The Reading and Writing Connections in Developing Overall L2 Literacy: A Case Study

Carmen Lucas 1,2

1 Departamento de Letras, Artes e Comunicação, Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, 5001-801 Vila Real, Portugal; carmenlucas3@gmail.com
2 Departamento de Línguas e Culturas, Universidade de Aveiro, Campus Universitário de Santiago, 3810-193 Aveiro, Portugal

Abstract: This study focused on the characteristics of an action-research study concerning an English language reading and writing intervention program in a primary state school, located in northeast Portugal (low-Socio Economic Status setting), where four groups of children \( n = 92 \) participated in the academic year 2019–2020, after the National strategy for foreign languages was launched. The longitudinal study carried out in the action-research methodology, where the teacher, syllabus designer and researcher was the main author, was set out with two main aims. The first was to tackle and to overcome the lack of teacher training for teaching English to young learners in Portuguese primary schools. The second was to prompt intervention, through the design and implementation of a suitable pedagogic approach for teaching English to young learners, in line with Content for Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL) principles, namely English Across the Curriculum, thus fostering the interrelationships between English language reading and writing skills. The findings of the action-research reading intervention program demonstrate that it is possible to overcome such barriers as pupils’ negative attitudes and counteract the damaging effects of poverty in foreign language literacy development by exposing them to children’s picturebooks/storybooks, thus fostering the overall literacy development. The key concepts explored in these books, being associated with primary key curriculum themes are an effective way to establish clear positive connections among English language reading and writing relationships. In addition, the current study also sheds light on how primary English language school teachers can design suitable pedagogic approaches to foster overall literacy development, thus advancing innovative teacher training opportunities.

Keywords: English language reading and writing; picturebooks/storybooks; teacher training; Content for Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL); English across the curriculum; reading motivation; cross-curricular approach

1. Introduction

English, the global lingua franca, enjoys a growing status worldwide. The high status of English is also linked to the increasing interest in teaching English to young learners (EYL), and is reciprocally linked to complex political, cultural and social forces (Burstall 1975a, 1975b; Nunan 1999; Crystal 2003; Pinter 2006; Macedo et al. 2006; Rivers and Mcmillan 2011; Carmel 2019).

As a consequence, currently the scope of language education in Europe includes all children within European education systems from as early an age as possible. This aim has been defined on the political agenda as an important life-skill for future citizens in our globalized societies (Council of Europe (1995) (White Paper 1995); Council of Europe (2001) (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages 2001); Council of Europe (Action Plan 2004–2006); Council of Europe (2004); Council of Europe (2007); Council of Europe (2010) (White Paper for Intercultural Dialogue 2010).
However, teaching English to young learners at primary school (especially in the first and second years, when children are 6 and 7 years old, respectively) demands different skills from those required to teach adolescents and adults. As a consequence, the primary school English teachers need to master a deep understanding of the theories of language teaching–learning to young learners, language classroom management and apply that knowledge when they design the classroom materials. Moreover, English teachers are not only required to be able to teach well in order to enhance meaningful learning, but also to be able to create and design approaches, methods, and techniques for teaching–learning English appropriately and effectively. At the time of the present study, one of the main issues affecting the success of English as a foreign language (EFL) primary school learners is the lack of appropriate continuous professional development opportunities (CPD). This is probably an issue all over the world. As the matter of fact, in their study, Copland et al. (2014) investigated the “scenario” concerning teaching English to young learners in Italy, UAE, Tanzania, Colombia and South Korea, thus discussing with teachers about the factors that would improve learning and teaching. The results were compelling and actually the first factor highlighted by teachers was “training in new language teaching methodologies”.

This has been further supported by the study carried out by Huang (2016) where he reported that the teachers of English to young learners faced similar problems, including students’ low L1 cognitive resources, parents’ indifferent attitudes toward English language education in primary schools, and the assortment of students of heterogeneous language skills into the same class, which are unique to the rural setting because of geographical and socio-economic confinement. In addition, the author also highlighted as one the main reasons for the difficulties in implementing English language teaching through a communicative language teaching approach, the “insufficient workshops” (76%) thus in agreement with the lack of teacher training opportunities. In addition, “teacher’s lack of knowledge related to appropriate English usage” (69%), and then “the use of words in Chinese by English language learners” (67%) are the most difficulties significant encountered. As such suitable and specific pedagogical teacher training opportunities need to be provided to teachers, teaching English to young learners. We should thus enquire what should be the profile of the 21st century primary school English language teacher and what opportunities have been provided so far in a national context.

1.1. The Case of Portugal

In today’s global world, it is important that children are entitled to efficient second language-teaching from a very early age. A part of this is certainly including in the English language teaching to young learners’ classroom pedagogies which include children’s literature/picturebooks and story-based lessons in fostering second language reading and writing (Fletcher and Reese 2005; Gentry 2010; Mourão 2015b). As argued by the Mourão (2015b), “with a picturebook, the potential for language learning arises from the active engagement that takes place between the learner and the book, which results in participation with and use of the language” (p. 214)

However, in Portugal, at present, whilst the need for good communicative skills in English, both in the workplace and in leisure time, is widely endorsed, the country is lacking proper awareness of suitable second language reading and writing educational policies and pedagogies, thus implying a lack of teacher training opportunities and EFL teachers’ awareness of the linguistic needs and motivational behaviors from Portuguese primary school children, especially those immersed in low-SES settings. Indeed, in her study on literacy development for low-SES children, Newman (2016) stated that an environmental print program provided multisensory strategies for children to interact with environmental print by identifying letters and words, tracing letters with fingers, and writing letters. Environmental print programs or print rich programs consist of arranging the classroom with literacy materials from children’s daily routines, such as cereal boxes, street signs, candy wrappers, yoghurt bottles. From these, letters printed in cereal boxes were found most useful, as they are colorful and interesting to look at. Within these, the program showed that guiding low-SES children interactions with environmental print using multisensory strategies is an effective way to foster
emergent literacy skills. These strategies consisted of for instance, cutting out familiar words from cereal boxes, labels from soup cans and from yogurt containers. Then, using these individual words ("Cheerios", "Chocapic" "tomato", "Danone"), to talk about capital and lower-case letters. Then, prompting discussion about the sounds of letters ("The letter C says Si"), thus encouraging children to read the words they have cut out.

The national strategy for introducing English in primary schools started with political initiatives in December 2006 (for children aged 8–9 years old), by the General Board of Innovation and Curricular Management (Ministry of Education 2006, General Board for Innovation and Curriculum Development, 2006), and then in 2012, lowering the age to be introduced to English as a foreign language (EFL) to 6 years old in primary state schools (Ministry of Education 2018).

One of the ambitions of national strategy for foreign languages was to provide all primary school-aged children entitlement to study a foreign language (English) throughout primary school (6–9 years old). Currently 6–7-year-old children are entitled to learn English as a foreign language and for 8–9-year-old pupils it is compulsory.

Since the publication of this strategy, one of the emerging questions is—*what exactly should be taught in the English language primary curriculum?* In the past and still at present, this has been a problematic area, and divergence in schools and initial teacher training institutions has been found. As a consequence, a variety of approaches has been implemented in primary state schools nationwide, mainly focusing merely on isolated vocabulary teaching and, sensitization programs.

1.2. The Need of Teacher Training for Teaching English to Young Learners in Portugal: What Should Be the Profile of Primary English Language Teachers?

Nowadays, teacher training and professional development are seen as central mechanisms for the improvement of teachers’ content knowledge and their teaching skills and practices in order to meet high educational standards and prepare our young learners to the proficient English language users of the future (Boudersa 2016).

Concerning the Portuguese context, when the national strategy started being implemented in 2005 (Ministry of Education 2005), among the teacher community a buzzword was to use the metaphor that “the house had been built starting from the roof”. Indeed, only a booklet with general instructions was published by the General Board of Curriculum Innovations (Ministry of Education 2005), but it was entirely up to each teacher to follow it or not. Yet and as mentioned previously, the major problem was that most teachers “landing” in primary school for teaching English to young learners originated from an initial teacher training to teach secondary school students and as such lacked proper awareness of how to teach English to young learners.

As a matter of fact, this study (Nunes 2011) confirmed that teachers who started teaching within the National Strategy for Languages (Ministry of Education 2005) were recruited by the most diverse entities, public or private, without having had the care to preserve: *wealth and breadth of specific pedagogical training for the primary school level of education;* their adequate pay scale; safeguarding the teachers’ rights at work; the necessary work conditions; appropriate time for motivation and effective teaching. They were professionals without proper or qualifications to teach English in primary schools. Their skills had been acquired in higher education institutions, and the teaching possibility was also given to holders of certificates from the University of Cambridge (CAE Certificate of Advanced English or CPE—Certificate of Proficiency in English), acquired in private language teaching institutions, to teach English in the primary school setting. In the “Dispatch No. 14753/2005 (second series)” the need for a definition of a competency profile of primary school English teachers and their association with a teacher training program was immediately pointed out. Therefore, the country did not have the necessary number of professionals properly qualified for the teaching at this new level of teaching English.

On the one hand, teachers with professional qualifications for teaching on more advanced levels of education, who have little to do with the required dynamics needed for teaching English in the
primary classroom. In addition, these teachers did not have adequate educational psychology training for this new level of education, nor the specific pedagogical knowledge for this age range. Naturally, from this lack of proper training and educational background derives a set of problems that can affect the quality and the motivation for learning English in primary schools. As such, when exposed to unstructured classes adequately or exposed to lower quality language teaching pedagogies, students may not develop an interest for learning English and most worryingly, this may hinder their future success in English language learning.

This has been further supported by Silva (2012), stressing the key need of provision for teacher training opportunities for English language teachers wishing to teach in primary school settings, as well as the appropriate preparation/equipment on the side of schools, since there was a weak or nearly null implementation of the strategy for learning English in primary schools, apart from small initiatives from local authorities and within private schools’ teaching and local authorities (Silva 2012). Moreover, when interviewed, primary English language teachers stated that they felt the absolute need to provide more detailed attention to “reading and writing”, followed after by the same average of teachers not knowing what to recommend (Silva 2012).

Further studies carried out in Portugal regarding the profile of primary English language teachers have produced reports, emphasizing “that would be pertinent to begin including a module on early language learning in pre-service courses for pre-primary professionals and language teachers. These modules should cover such topics as language learning approaches and methodologies for small children, second language development and child development, with an emphasis on collaborative methodologies involving both a pre-primary professional and a language teacher” (Frias 2014; Mourão and Lourenço 2015; Mourão and Ferreirinha 2016). These studies lead to the conclusion that further and urgent research is needed as well as a greater and deeper understanding regarding how Portuguese primary English school teachers can take continuous professional development opportunities in order to appropriately support and develop the connections between reading and writing skills, because being able to read proficiently is a crucial skill all students must master in order to become fluent readers and writers.

To address these research gaps, the current study is set out to address what nature of teacher training opportunities should be provided to primary English language teachers.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Motivation for Developing Reading

Traditionally, research carried out on motivation as it pertained to education focused mainly on the concept of achievement or academic motivation as a broad construct generalized across all domains in a child’s academic experience. Only in the relatively recent past has research focused on the intersection of motivation and reading achievement (Yesil-Dagli 2011; Mehigan 2020).

Within this line of thought, and Yum et al. (2021) argue in their paper that pictures and written language relate across four levels of interfaces. An inherent relation is when text appears within the world of the images. An emergent relation occurs using visual “carriers” of text, where the “tail” links the carrier (like a thought bubble) to its visual “root” (like a thinker). This relationship tightly joins the text to the image through a conventionalized interface. Finally, an independent relation keeps text and image completely separate, such as a picture illustrating ideas of a separated caption or body text.

Previously, Tolentino and Lawson (2015), in their paper regarding emergent readers and writers, have strongly reasoned that in schools, the dominant mode of communication is through written language. As such, children’s ability to convey ideas through the printed word is highly emphasized as their success as literacy learners is contingent on their ability to read and write. As early as preschool, young children are building their repertoire of print knowledge and are using emergent writing in the form of drawing, scribbles, letter strings and invented spelling that reflect phonetic principles as part of their transition to conventional forms (Sulzby 1992; Al-Momani et al. 2010; Arikan and Taraf 2010;
In this study, the emergent literacy theoretical constructs are important considering that the participant children had had no previous contact with the foreign language, and as such, the constructs to bear in mind needed to consider how literacy develops both in the native and in the foreign language. This is particularly relevant because the participant children were immersed in low-SES settings. As a consequence, their literacy skills in the native language were very low, so some of the strategies used to foster foreign literacy development in early childhood education were adapted and applied to the children aged 6–7 years old for learning English. Moreover, Zhang and Liu (2018) referred back to the review studies carried out by Saracho and Spodek (2010) involving picturebooks/storybook reading, thus confirming a positive effect of storybook reading on emergent literacy. In turn, Justice et al. (2009) compared the use of print referencing by preschool teachers and traditional storybook reading, and found that print referencing had positive effects on building early literacy skills. Similarly, a longitudinal study conducted by Piasta et al. (2012) also found print referencing to be influential on children’s early literacy skills. Picturebooks are also known in the literature as “storybooks” (Ellis and Brewster 2014). More recently, the term “authentic children’s literature” has emerged, and for the purpose of English language learning, it is the authenticity of the words together with the picturebooks, which allow meaning making for young learners (Mourão 2015b). Resorting to a definition from Bader, 1976: 1, “a picturebook is a text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture ( . . . ), a social, cultural, historic document, and foremost an experience for a reader. As an art form it focuses on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the display of two facing pages, and on the suspense of the turning page”. Through resorting to picturebooks for reading in an L2 classroom, the English language teacher can scaffold children’s learning, locating children’s current understanding, therefore adjusting the level of teacher support in response to children’s development (Vygotsky 1978).

As a consequence, teacher training and awareness towards the effective methodologies for teaching reading in primary English classrooms is of the utmost importance, as teachers’ selection of L2 instructional materials for L2 reading lessons also influences learners reading motivation. Further research has suggested that using authentic storybooks/picturebooks can increase learners’ comprehension abilities if learners engage with them in ways that go beyond learning a specific skill (Treiman and Broderick 1998; Treiman et al. 1998; Treiman 2005; Ritchey and Speece 2006; Duke et al. 2006; Purcell-Gates et al. 2007; Enever 2011). As children’s picturebooks/storybooks allow working themes from primary key curriculum themes, they also allow the design of cross-curricular approaches, which echoes principles from Content for Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology for young learners (Vee 2008; Coyle and Hood 2010) (Appendix A).

Concerning the Portuguese scenario for teaching English to young learners in primary schools, unlike the common used strategy in other countries, picturebooks have not been used in Portuguese primary schools for teaching English (Mourão 2015a).

Although second language reading and writing development has been considered to be crucial in children’s future success in school, there are two main research gaps: (1) the lack of suitable primary school English teacher training opportunities; (2) scarce research literature existing in Portugal concerning the most suitable pedagogical approaches for introducing and developing second language reading and writing approaches for teaching English to young learners in Portuguese primary schools.

2.2. Research Questions

Therefore, the aims of the present study are:

(1) To analyze to what extent the lack of appropriate teacher training opportunities for teaching young learners negatively impacts on primary school students’ English language reading and writing achievement?

(2) To what extent is using picturebooks/storybooks effective in motivating young English language learners, thus having a positive impact in strengthening the connections in English language reading and writing?
3. Method

3.1. Context

This study was carried out in a primary school classroom, encompassing the four grades of primary education (all place and participant names are pseudonyms), which was located in a rural area in the northeast Portugal, classified as a low-SES setting. The pupils were predominantly from economically challenged backgrounds, bearing in mind that about 40% qualified for free and reduced-price lunches during the school year and entitlement to a social worker. The school did not have any technological equipment, so the participant researcher needed to take all the necessary materials in advance. The school followed the national curriculum framework that the participant researcher directly aligned with the action-research plan to target key curriculum themes, such as social studies, mathematics and arts and crafts. The class’ daily schedule started with individual literacy and mathematics activities as morning work, before the regular daily classes in content areas including English as a second language as the last taught subject.

3.2. Sites and Participants

The school in the present study was considered as a high-poverty, low-performing school according to state Department of primary state instruction and primary teacher reports. The sample for this study included first, second, third and fourth grade primary school children \((n=92)\) (6–9 years old), from a low-SES setting, attending EFL primary sessions in two Portuguese state schools. Research ethics were adhered to by following the British Education Research Association (BERA) that endorses the set of ethical principles agreed in 2015 by the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) through in-depth consultation with its member learned societies (including BERA). These principles are as follows:

- *Social science is fundamental to a democratic society, and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods and perspectives.* This principle was achieved by implementing an action-research program in a low-SES setting, thus endowing children the opportunity to learn English and exposing them to the most recent trends for effect English language reading and writing development.

- *All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.* This was set by obtaining parental consent for the children to participate in the study, thus ensuring anonymity.

- *All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.* As previously stated, the implemented approach was thought to be beneficial for the learners, and actually the results put in evidence outstanding qualitative progress in their ability to read and write.

- *All social science should aim to maximize benefit and minimize harm.* By implementing the action-research plan in order to foster literacy development in the foreign language, we were actually making an attempt to counteract the damaging effects of poverty in literacy development. (British Educational Research Association 2018)

All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Project: Abordagem Integrada ao Ensino do Inglês no 1.ºCEB e no Pré-escolar (SFRH/BD/31708/2006).

3.3. Research Design and Classroom Observational Procedures: The Developed Qualitative Study

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) outlined five characteristics of qualitative research, all of which are relevant to the present study: (a) the study takes place in the natural setting in which events occur;
(b) collected data are descriptive; (c) the research is concerned with process; (d) analysis of data is inductive; and (e) the research focuses on meaning. Because this inquiry concerned the classroom experience and process of English language reading and writing development, it was suitable to employ qualitative methods to investigate the nuances and complexities of foreign language learning.

At the beginning of the study, the present author maintained both the roles of L2 language teacher and researcher, but not as syllabus designer, thus changing one of the conditions of data gathering. Therefore, the present author delivered L2 lessons in primary state schools and was not responsible for the L2 pedagogic approach design.

### 3.4. Describing the Study

The study was conducted with two groups of low-SES primary school children (6–7 and 8–9 years old students), attending Grade 3 and Grade 4 from a state primary school located outside the city center of Vila Real, in a low-SES setting. Students spent two of their class periods (2 h/week) engaged with EFL lessons. Both of these groups (one class of 20 and another of 25 students) were exposed to reading and writing lessons (Intervention Reading Program, Appendix B), after having been depicted serious levels of demotivation behaviors in the EFL classroom. By focusing mainly on vocabulary in a rather isolated manner, the previous teaching methodology disregarded a communicative language teaching classroom based on meaning construction. Therefore, children practiced the newly presented vocabulary items through mechanical exercises and question–answer drills. Bearing those behaviors in mind and considering the international literature concerning effective ways to foster emergent foreign language literacy development and in line with CLIL principles under the form of English across the Curriculum, a selection of six non-fiction storybooks were used to teach English to young learners (Picturebooks/Storybooks):

- Dear Zoo: A Lift-the-Flap Book (Rod Campbell)
- The Very Hungry Caterpillar (Eric Carle)
- The Gruffalo (Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler)
- The Gruffalo’s Child (Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler)
- A Squash and a Squeeze (Julia Donaldson and Alex Scheffler)
- Monkey Puzzle (Julia Donaldson)

The books were chosen on topics related to the science/social studies curriculum (Elephants, Minibeasts, Life in the Forest, Wild Animals, the Life Cycle, The Family) subjects fully delivered in children’s native language in this school. Books ranged from 12 to 20 pages long and had large photographs and illustrations on each page. The difficulty of books increased slightly throughout the school year. From October to February, most readers aimed at grades 3–4 (with an average of 404 words per book) and from March until May, most of them aimed at grades 4–5 (with an average of 530 words per book). Some of the books included audio files, with the stories being narrated in British English and some follow-up songs. Some of these were used to foster lively oral interaction in the EFL classroom. The reading speed of the audio files ranged from 76 to 123 words per minute, depending on the book collection and level. In class, students were supposed to spend approximately 20 min per session engaged with reading/listening.

On finishing reading/listening to the book, students were asked to interact with the EFL teacher and orally complete the gaps (i.e., “I wrote a letter to the Zoo to send me a dog. But they sent me a . . .?” and students should reply (after watching the EFL teacher lifting the flap) “lion”. This procedure was repeated for the other examples in the book.

Afterwards, children were challenged to carry out two written post-reading activities. One of these activities consisted in selecting eight “new” words and translating them, and the other involved language production. From October to February, students were asked to answer questions (what?/who?/where?, true/false, multiple choice) about the content of the book they had just read which would later be used
to run a class contest. If there was time left, they were encouraged to ask a classmate their questions. During the period from February to May, the language production task was changed; students were now asked to answer a set of about 20 wh- and true/false questions about the book and not read the book a second time.

As it can be observed, the EFL teacher started by being the “teller” at the beginning of the EFL reading lesson and accordingly to learners’ active responses, it is possible to observe a combination of styles, of both “teller” and “coacher”, thus assisting children in their foreign language learning. Therefore, it is also possible to verify that the degree of learner active response or interaction is closely interrelated with the choice and use of EFL instructional material, such as storybooks. As these were interactive, they provided learners with opportunities to use the foreign language more, thus building self-confidence to use the language.

In addition, and as these were economically disadvantaged children with low L1 literacy achievement, it came as a surprise to find they were “able to speak in English”. Further and as registered in the researcher’s field notes, after the implementation of the EFL reading program, it was possible to capture the following attitudinal change (10 March 2020).

1. L1: “You know teacher, before I did not enjoy English, but now I do.”
2. L2: “I like English too.”
3. T: “Why?”
4. L3: “You know, sometimes I say I do not like English, and before I did not, but now I do enjoy it and whenever I say I do not, I’m just joking”.

4. Findings

The qualitative data analyses first identified EFL primary learners’ negative attitudes in relation to English language learning in primary school, most likely due to the lack of teacher training and awareness to teach such a young age range, with specific needs and responsive only to certain methodologies. Students’ negative attitudes were depicted from the lesson’s audio-recordings and by resorting to the application of the Leuven involvement scale for young children. As previously stated, the preliminary stage of the study returned some negative results, such as lack of involvement and disruptive behaviors. As a consequence, a second stage of the study was imperative. This was achieved through the design and implementation of an action-plan, the EFL Intervention Reading Program. The EFL Intervention Reading Program was examined in relation to the following dimensions:

(a) Initial EFL methodologies’ outcomes;
(b) The effects of the use of storybooks and worksheets (EFL instructional material) in students’ reading and writing achievement;
(c) Degree of learner active response/interaction/involvement.

The extract below shows examples of primary learners’ English language interaction when exposed to an authentic interactive picturebooks/storybook and learner’s active responses. As it can be observed, learner’s active responses become increasingly higher as they acquire a better understanding of the story. It should be mentioned however that the content vocabulary was not previously taught in order to ensure a more engaging effect, with higher levels of learner active responses. Own language use (L1) and foreign language (FL) use is indicated in square brackets. This transcription convention was suppressed when the teacher was telling the story since she used the FL only.
Effects of the “new” EFL instructional material: storybook Dear Zoo (27th January 2020).

1. T: Now, Mrs. [author] is going to tell you a story about the animals, okay?
2. About the Zoo, okay? So, I am going to start okay? So please listen, okay?
3. T: ‘I wrote [T uses points to herself to explain ‘I’ and uses hand gestures to convey writing symbol] a letter to the Zoo. They sent me a... [and lifts the flap and shows the elephant] So, I wrote a letter.
4. L [L1]: Say it in Portuguese.
5. T: I wrote a letter [T picks up paper and pen and pretends writing as she speaks] 8 L [L1]: oh! You are writing.
6. T: Yes! I wrote a letter to the Zoo to ask for a pet, an animal, okay?
7. T: And they, the Zoo sent me an [T pauses a bit before uncovering the hidden animal] elephant.
   He was too big [T uses gestures and puts her hands above her 12 head]. He was too big, too big. [T places hand over her head to convey the meaning of big] 14 L [L1]: big!
8. Classroom [L1]: too big.
9. T: I sent him back [T uses right hand turning it to the right to convey the act of sending something away].
10. L [L1]: you went away.
11. Teacher: no, he, he [pointing to the animal picture] went away.
12. L [L1]: he went away [points to herself again and conveys act of sending away].
13. T: I sent him back, yes!
14. T: So the Zoo sent me a? [T uses a sort o question emphasis before revealing the animal] giraffe!
15. Learners [L2]: Giraffe!
16. T: He was too tall. [T lifts up her feet and puts her hands above her head, showing her hand above her height]. Too tall.
17. Classroom [L1]: Too big. Bigger.
18. I sent him back.
19. L [L1]: he was evil.
20. T: Yes. He was too fierce. I sent him back.
21. L [L1]: he went away again.
22. Classroom [L1]: camel! Camel!
23. T: a camel!
24. Classroom [L2]: camel!
25. T: a camel!
26. Classroom [L2]: a camel!
27. T: he was too grumpy! [T crosses arms and pretends a grumpy face]. Too grumpy. Too grumpy.
28. Classroom [L1]: irritable.
29. T: Yes, too grumpy. I sent him back.
30. Classroom [L1]: he went away.
31. T: Yes. So they sent me a?
32. Classroom [L1]: snake!
33. T: snake!
38. Classroom [L1]: teacher, you know we have seen a snake here in our school and we killed her. Yeah, she went from this life for a better one. She was poisonous.
39. T: So they sent me a snake. She was too scary. So I sent him back. They sent me a?
40. Classroom [L1]: monkey! Monkey!
41. T: Monkey! But he was too naughty [T laughs, changes on voice-tone and 61 pretends to be making fun of something, stealing learners’ notebooks to convey the meaning of naughty].
42. Classroom [L1]: bad behaved. 64 L [L1]: he won’t steal my stuff!
43. T: Yes, naughty. The monkey was very naughty. The monkey was too naughty. I sent him back.
44. T: So they sent me a?
45. L [L1]: frog.
46. T: frog. But he was too jumpy [T pretends small jumps]. So I sent him back.
47. L [L1]: he’s gone.
48. T: In English!
49. T/Classroom: I sent him back.
50. T: So at the Zoo they thought and thought and thought [T points with one finger to her head making small circles] and sent me a?
51. Classroom [L2]: Dog!
52. T: Dog! He was perfect. I kept him [T joins her arms as she was preparing herself to hug a baby to suggest withholding something in a caring way].
53. T: So, did you like the story? Did you like the story? [Teacher smiles to convey the verb like and points to the storybook]
54. Classroom [L1]: Yes!
55. L [L1]: elephant
56. ( . . . ) 13:16–story review
57. T: So, what animal would you like? Would you like the monkey, the elephant, the giraffe, the lion, the camel or the snake? Which animal would you like
58. [points to learner]?
59. L [L2]: elephant

As it can be seen from the above extract, there was lively oral interaction in the EFL classroom, thus making actual use of the language. This is in line with two prior studies, where L2 teachers who elicited active learner responses had learners who were more fluent in reading (Taylor et al. 2003) or whose fluency improved over time, not only in speaking, but especially concerning reading and writing (as per Figures 1–4).

In Figure 1, it is possible to observe that the learner was able not only to label the Gruffalo’s body parts, but also to translate English sentences into Portuguese in a way that was grammatically correct. Similarly, in Figure 2, it is possible to verify that the learner was equally able to appropriately match the sentences to the pictures, thus giving meaning to the second language.

In Figure 4, it is possible to attest the learners’ ability to read and interpret the meaning of a text, by reading and coloring it correctly.
T: So at the Zoo they thought and thought and thought [T points with one finger to her head making small circles] and sent me a?

Classroom [L2]: Dog!

T: Dog! He was perfect. I kept him [T joins her arms as she was preparing herself to hug a baby to suggest withholding something in a caring way].

T: So, did you like the story? Did you like the story? [Teacher smiles to convey the verb like and points to the storybook]

Classroom [L1]: Yes!

(…) 13:16–story review

T: So, what animal would you like? Would you like the monkey, the elephant, the giraffe, the lion, the camel or the snake? Which animal would you like [points to learner]?

L [L2]: elephant

As it can be seen from the above extract, there was lively oral interaction in the EFL classroom, thus making actual use of the language. This is in line with two prior studies, where L2 teachers who elicited active learner responses had learners who were more fluent in reading (Taylor et al. 2003) or whose fluency improved over time, not only in speaking, but especially concerning reading and writing (as per Figures 1–4).

Figure 1. L2 vocabulary acquisition and ability to translate functional sentences.

Figure 2. L2 Reading, matching and writing.
Figure 3. Children’s ability to read, recognize and correctly assign labels to pictures.

Figure 4. Understanding reading and coloring.
4.1. The EFL Questionnaire Application

As a qualitative enquirer, I was aimed at a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study, and as such wanted to obtain the pupils’ views regarding learning English and how they perceived the teaching and learning process. Therefore, we resorted to and adapted a special instrument developed in 1999 by Marianne Nikolov applied to Hungarian EFL learners, in order to understand attitudes in general, the learning situation and their own (de)motivation.

This was a questionnaire, which consisted of six open questions in Portuguese and was administered in the beginning of the second term (January 2019) of the academic year (Appendix C). It was presented in the children’s mother tongue in order that it was not looked upon as a test in any way. Further, a brief introductory text was embedded through a “make-believe” story where children were required to answer Paddington’s questions related to English so he could come to Portugal and learn Portuguese (see Appendices B and C for questions in English and Portuguese). Children were not required to give their names and they were given enough time to write as much as they liked.

The questionnaire included the same six open questions for the first, second, third and fourth years of primary school (children aged 6 to 9 years old) within a term period. Questions were made to obtain in-depth answers regarding the reasons for learning foreign languages. The provided questionnaire was aimed at answering to the research questions: (a) what are children’s reasons to learn English and (b) what issues do they raise concerning English language teaching?

4.2. The EFL Questionnaire Results

4.2.1. Reasons for learning English

As already stated in the instruments’ section, within the study a questionnaire priory developed by Nikolov (1999) was applied into the EFL classroom. The first question asked children about the reason they are learning FL-English. Children’s answers can be grouped into four broad types: (a) willingness to communicate; (b) the classroom experience; (c) external reasons and (d) utilitarian/instrumental reasons.

The youngest primary learners (6–7-year-olds). The participating children in the first two grades of primary school provided the following reasons—willingness to communicate related-reasons: “talk in English”; “to know more about the language”; “It’s good to learn the language”. External, utilitarian reasons were represented by statements such as: “to travel to other countries”. All the answers provided by this group were positive statements. Children also listed English as a favorite school subject (9/10), although it is not a compulsory school subject in the primary school curriculum.

The older primary learners (8–9-year-olds). The answers of third and fourth grades to the same question included similar reasons, but the differences are also obvious. Reasons related to classroom experience included: “in English you learn new things”, “I think it is interesting”, “I like English”. External/utilitarian reasons were more frequent and different from younger learners: “because my mother said that if I am going to travel it is very necessary”; “if I go anywhere in the country with English people understand me and I understand them”; “in order to when people ask me things in English I know how to reply”; “I am going to learn how to speak in English, language”; “if I go anywhere in the country [England] through English people understand what my intentions are”; “English is very important and you learn it”.

When providing these reasons, children tend to look ahead into the future and they typically mention either very general points or specific situations where the knowledge of English will be useful. Moreover, this is in line with recent trends from second language acquisition research related to willingness to learn the target language and children’s willingness to communicate with foreign-speaking others (Tannenbaum and Tahar 2008; MacIntyre et al. 2001, 2003, 2012). It might be further argued that children are picturing themselves as proficient L2 speakers, thus providing a basis to argue both instrumental and integrative motivation.

A difference has emerged however in relation to the younger group, external, negative-like reasons such as: “it is compulsory” (1); “I don’t understand a thing about English” (1) and “I don’t like English” (3).
Comparing the two groups. The comparison of the two groups has revealed an age–attitude correlation, in that the younger children are, the more positive their attitudes will be. In the younger primary school group, there is a complete absence of negative attitudes. In turn, both EFL primary groups provided mainly external/utilitarian reasons, but younger learners expressed their willingness to communicate with foreign-speaking others more. In addition, there is a steep increase in utilitarian reasons, such as travelling and the need of communicating with foreign-speaking others.

Further, parental attitude also appears to be important (also linked to utilitarian reason): “because my mother said that if I am going to travel it is very necessary”. It should also be added that parental pressure could be underlying for the third group of children, as they would be progressing into the fifth grade, where English is a compulsory school subject, and as such, this stage was faced as a foundation for children’s foreign language academic training.

A general tendency can be isolated from children’s answers, linked to utilitarian reasons. In relation to the registered negative answers/attitudes, the reason for this phenomenon must be due to negative experiences in other school subjects, as reported by the primary school teacher. As children were accustomed to low achievements in their native language, their expectations for success in the target language as well as their self-esteem levels were very low. As these attitudes also reflect a negative attitude towards the learning context, activities and tasks, and a lack of an intrinsic motive, an action-plan was drawn and implemented into the classroom, resorting to authentic storybooks. It should be mentioned that although the questionnaire was not administered a second time, audio-recordings of EFL sessions allowed us to depict a progress in children’s attitudes, which was also reflected in the classroom’s group dynamics and lesser occurrence of disruptive behaviors. This attitudinal change culminated in a school play performance, where these apparently “de-motivated” learners were able to present a school play in English, Portuguese and French.

Classroom-related motives. As previously stated in the “procedures” section, a change implemented by the present author from January 2020 onwards was the introduction of authentic, interactive picturebooks/storybooks in English language lessons in two Portuguese primary state schools. These provided effective results, especially in a mixed-aged classroom with a background of disruptive behaviors. When learners were exposed to the story, first they were surprised that the teacher took something new and special for them, which boosted their self-confidence and self-esteem (Aram and Biron 2004). As a consequence, they acquired an interest in the language, and this was surprising given the fact that they had no sort of interest until then. In our own perspective, storybooks must be authentic sources of the language we are teaching as representatives of that culture. In terms of the reality of our EFL Portuguese classrooms, if teachers find ways of creating interaction in the English classroom, and if learners listen to the FL more, they will use it more instead of their own native language. In addition, learners should be led to the full discovery of the meaning of the story so that the discovery and surprise dimensions do not disappear and stories do not lose their power.

4.2.2. Changes in Learners’ Assessment

In the first implemented EFL syllabus, testing focused mainly on traditional rote learned material and learners’ involvement was not generally fostered by supply teachers teaching English in primary schools. Further, within the report cards provided to parents at the end of the first trimester, the outcomes of third and fourth grade primary children located in northeast Portugal were negative. This is in line with the first traditional testing phase carried by the foreign language teacher and present author. In December 2019, in a sample of 20 pupils, 11 were far below positive score and thus only 5 had a positive score. Later in the school year, changes in the assessment were introduced: (a) the “test” was based in the stories brought into the classroom and (b) a behavior map was present in every single lesson, in order to help learners to self-regulate their behaviors in EFL sessions. Although in our own view, doing formative worksheets is only one of the several factors involved in foreign language assessment, it was possible to observe slight improvements in some EFL learners’ performance whereas
others became closer to a positive marking. Therefore, the fact that some children have been able to improve their foreign language learning is an unexpected finding.

It might be further argued that traditional testing might be one of the causes of children’s negative attitudes as they identify “tests” as a threat. Our own interpretation of children’s attitudes is that they might have previously worked in a pedagogical school context where, unlike in English sessions, mistakes were always perceived as signs of deficiencies rather than signs of development.

4.3. The Leuven Involvement Scale

The Leuven involvement scale (Laevers 1994) (Table 1) was adapted and used to monitor and compare children’s involvement levels and attitudes regarding the EFL sessions, thus taking samples at different times: (1) from October to December 2019 and (2) from January to May 2020, in order to obtain comparison within data, thus monitoring children’s L2 literacy development prior to L2 reading and writing program implementation and how reading and writing skills would evolve across time.

Table 1. The Leuven Scale for Involvement and Well-being.

| Level | Well-Being | Signals |
|-------|------------|---------|
| 1     | Extremely low | The child clearly shows signs of discomfort such as crying or screaming. They may look dejected, sad, frightened or angry. The child does not respond to the environment, avoids contact and is withdrawn. The child may behave aggressively, hurting him/herself or others. |
| 2     | Low         | The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the child does not feel at ease. However, the signals are less explicit than under level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed the whole time. |
| 3     | Moderate    | The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signs indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort. |
| 4     | High        | The child shows obvious signs of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity. |
| 5     | Extremely high | The child looks happy and cheerful, smiles, cries out with pleasure. They may be lively and full of energy. Actions can be spontaneous and expressive. The child may talk to him/herself, play with sounds, hum, sing. The child appears relaxed and does not show any signs of stress or tension. He/she is open and accessible to the environment. The child expressed self-confidence and self-assurance. |

After proceeding to preliminary data analyses and given the considerable amount of children’s “de-motivation” behaviors, the L2 teacher decided to change a condition in the data collection process, which was the English language “syllabus change”. This included bringing children’s picturebooks/storybooks into the classroom, which occurred from early January 2020 to May 2020. English lessons’ audio recording made it possible to proceed to lesson transcription and content analysis so the findings could be cross-checked with the Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children (LIS-IC) scale.

Lessons’ audio recordings were verbatim transcribed and the data were analyzed through a method of reducing data and making sense of them through the application of content data analysis’ procedures (Miles and Huberman 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

5. Content for Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL), through English across the Curriculum

As identified in the EFL questionnaires, classroom-related motives emerged as one of the causes for children “not enjoying” English lessons. As a consequence, within primary school education settings, introducing second language approaches to teach English can be achieved through cross-curricular work, resorting to CLIL methodologies for young learners through English across the curriculum (EAC), as per Table 2 below.
Table 2. Learning Unit: Science/Social Studies–sequencing activities.

| OBJECTIVES                                                                 | Activities                                                                 | CONTENTS                                                                 | Projects                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ◆ Introduce the topic “Animals” (Pets/ Wild Animals)                      | Speaking                                                                  | • can name Pets/Wild Animals: dog; giraffe, frog, lion, snake, monkey   | - Animals’ habitat                                                        |
| ◆ Listen to the song “hello, how are you?”                                 | Listening                                                                 | • can listen to a story about animals                                  | - Chose an animal/pet to keep                                             |
| ◆ Mime the teachers’ actions to help understanding meaning                 |                                                                           | • can identify animals by associating corresponding adjectives when listening: “fierce, tall, jumpy” |                                                                           |
| ◆ Follow the story by interacting through gestures and animal sounds.      | Speaking                                                                  | • can fill-in gaps in the story                                         |                                                                           |
| ◆ Ask their peers “what’s your favorite animal?”                           |                                                                           | • can choose an animal by using question and answer                    |                                                                           |
| ◆ Use phrases modeled by the story/teacher                                 |                                                                           | “what’s your favorite animal?” / “My favorite animal is the …”         |                                                                           |
| ◆ Make a drawing about their favorite animal.                              | Writing                                                                   | • can write the several modeled                                        |                                                                           |
| ◆ Express preferences by writing them                                       | question and answer                                                       | • can express the way he/she feels—“I’m hungry”, “I’m sad”, “I’m tired”, “I’m happy”. | English: relevant vocabulary related to the topic–Pets/Wild animals *(depending on the social setting teacher must be aware that learners might not be familiar with all the vocabulary in their native language.) |
| ◆ Listen to the story “The very Hungry Caterpillar”, by Eric Carle         |                                                                           |                                            | Expressing feelings                                                      |
| ◆ Interact within the story by filling-in gaps                            | Listening                                                                 | • can listen to a story                                                | Cross-curricular links: Social Study by                                  |
| ◆ Discuss why they have chosen a certain animal                            | Speaking                                                                  | • can fill-in gaps in the story                                        |                                                                           |
| ◆ Order the story events                                                  |                                                                           | • can justify the animal choice                                        |                                                                           |
| ◆                                                                           | Listening                                                                 | • can understand the events in a story                                 |                                                                           |
| ◆                                                                           |                                                                           | • can order the story’s events                                         |                                                                           |
| ◆                                                                           | Speaking                                                                  | • can name animals                                                     |                                                                           |
| ◆                                                                           |                                                                           | • can identify animals by using question and answer                    |                                                                           |
| ◆                                                                           |                                                                           | • can specify animal features by using adjectives                     |                                                                           |

"Cross-curricular links: Social Study by discussing Pets/Wild Animals; Endangered species in Literature–describing animals by using adjectives."

*(too tall*: “too fierce’, ‘… *)

Photocopies

Worksheet
5.1. Authentic Storybooks and Narration

The action-plan included changes in the EFL syllabus, such as the introduction of authentic storybooks as well as of storytelling in EFL sessions, total physical response (TPR) songs; hence, adapting learning goals and assessment to children’s abilities. Thus, the EFL teacher resorted to three authentic interactive storybooks: Dear Zoo, The Gruffalo and The Gruffalo’s Child. All the three storybooks were chosen by the EFL teacher, and were also judged by her as appropriate for the class level. Storytelling was prepared beforehand by (1) thinking of every necessary step so children could guess/achieve meaning. This included telling the story at a slow pace, considering the fact that children were low-achieving learners in L1 literacy; (2) preparing every gesture to convey meaning and vocalization training, so children’s attention could be fully captured. After this preliminary stage, the teacher would open up the storybook, make sure children were paying attention and would start telling the story. Initially and to demonstrate children were following the story, limited use of their own language was allowed. However, and as the teacher had made a compulsory condition to use English only, afterwards children started interacting in English. In addition, storybooks provided an opportunity to review content as well as the introduction of new contents, such as subject content from science/social study. These changes lead to an attitudinal change regarding learning English, as depicted below. At the end of the lesson in third and fourth years of primary school, within the middle sampling stage, several learners (L) approached the teacher (T) and said:

1. L1: “You know teacher, before I did not enjoy English, but now I do.”
2. L2: “I like English too.”
3. T: “Why?”
4. L1: “I don’t know, I just know I enjoy it now.”
5. L3: “You know, sometimes I say I do not like English, and before I did not, but now I do enjoy it and whenever I say I do not, I’m just joking.”

Most students spontaneously compared the information they had gained from being read the books with their previous English lessons to say that they were learning more from English now than before, and that this was due to the use of picturebooks/storybooks and following activities within the EFL reading sessions.

5.2. The Multilingual School Play

Throughout the academic year, the EFL teacher in cooperation with the primary school teacher prepared a multilingual school play, which included three languages—English, Portuguese and French, as some of the learners had immigrant parents working in France. It was carried out in an open space, where children’s parents could attend, and this initially “de-motivated” group was able to use the foreign language they had been learning and other language with which they had even more limited contact with.

The findings evidence clear relations between semiotic systems of language and images, by examining how reading and writing develop in clear connection as well as the emergence of bilingualism, expressed in children’s ability to translate from English into Portuguese (Figure 3).

Afterwards the action-plan for fostering L2 reading and writing skills was examined in relation to children’s ability to read and write before and after being exposed children’s literature. As it could be observed, at an initial stage there was overall failure in assessment, whereas after the implementation of the action-research plan, pupils’ intended learning outcomes in the L2 reading and writing skills improved significantly (as per Figures 1–3). As such, learner’s active responses became more frequent as they understood the story and acquired the language structures embedded within.

As such, it is also possible to verify that the degree of learner L2 interaction is closely interrelated with the choice and use of L2 reading and writing instructional material. As these were interactive picturebooks (i.e., “flip-flaps”), they provided learners with opportunities to use the second language more, thus becoming fluent in the second language, establishing the parallels with bilingualism.
“Flip-flaps” consist of a storybook where there are covered pictures, that can easily be uncovered, by lifting the bit of paper which covers the picture. They are considered interactive as they allow a higher level of interaction in the classroom, as the teacher may describe and ask what animal is hiding so students try to guess, and then lift the flap to confirm the children’s guesses.

6. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was twofold:

(1) To observe the implementation of the initial national strategy for teaching English to young learners in Portuguese primary schools, in association with the lack of suitable teacher training opportunities;

(2) To analyze the effects of an action-research plan, based on a reading intervention program (resorting to picturebooks/storybooks) to foster the connections between reading and writing in English.

At the initial stage of the study (first stage), when the Leuven protocol was applied, children’s involvement levels were very low, and de-motivating behaviors arose. These were mainly caused by the negative outcomes/marks obtained in learners’ formal assessment methods/traditional tests. Therefore, in the first phase of implemented EFL syllabus/approach, testing focused mainly on traditional rote learned material, focusing on a set of isolated words only. Further, within the report cards provided to parents at the end of the first term, the outcomes of third and fourth grade primary children located in northeast Portugal were negative. This is in line with the first traditional testing phase carried by the foreign language teacher and present author. In January 2020, in a sample of 64 pupils, 44 were far below a positive score and thus only 20 had a positive score. Afterwards in the school year (March 2020) changes in the assessment were introduced, namely the “test” was based on the stories brought into the classroom. Therefore, results from the second “testing” phase demonstrated that pupils’ L2 performance significantly improved whereas other pupils became closer to a positive grade.

Therefore, and having proceeded to an analysis of the Portuguese Ministry of Education official report, the bilingual teacher/researcher resorted to an action-plan, thus changing EFL pedagogic procedures and resorting to the introduction of children’s literature in the classroom. Through the application of this condition and resorting to the Leuven protocol, a remarkable progression in children’s involvement in L2 sessions was observed, thus enhancing overall classroom motivation and improving overall L2 literacy skills. Therefore, we consider that through an external condition (i.e., children’s literature) motivation was generated within learners and negative attitudes stopped evolving. It was also found that these strategies help by counteracting the effects of poverty and its consequences on children’s literacy development (i.e., Korat 2005), which might in turn hinder foreign language literacy development, as children transfer L1 “failure” to the foreign language.

This is in accordance with one of the first categories to emerge from the content analysis procedures, which was classroom-related motives, as the change in the classroom was prompted by the bilingual teacher, thus creating “ideal” conditions for second language reading and writing.

(5.1) The action-research plan analysis regarding the effects of a reading intervention program (resorting to picturebooks/storybooks) to foster the connections between reading and writing in English.

Within classroom-related motives, when learners were exposed to the picturebooks/children’s literature, first they were surprised that the teacher took something new and special for them, which boosted their self-confidence and self-esteem (Aram and Biron 2004). As a consequence, they acquired an interest for the second language, and this was surprising given the fact that they had no sort of interest until then. From our own perspective, children’s literature must be an authentic source of the language being taught, i.e., as representative of that Culture. In addition, learners should be led to the full discovery of the meaning of the story so that the discovery and surprise dimensions do not disappear and stories do not lose their power.
Through the application of children’s literature within the L2 classroom context, an L2 language-learning classroom is able to become “a protective environment where students can make mistakes without lasting repercussions. Thus it can be seen not only as a preparation for experience but also as an experience itself” (Gobêl and Helmke 2010, p. 1572). Added to the use of children’s literature, accessing foreign worlds was achieved by cartoon-based materials, thus designing cross-curricular work within social study related to the topic “Body Parts” and “Wild Animals” (Figure 2).

Moreover, the topic links itself with official primary curriculum themes from social study (Sciences (i.e., “My Body”/ “Animals”).

Likewise, Helot and Young (2006) reported from a French school project, where parents were invited to present their culture and language in classes. They found several positive effects, among others that immigrant children started to make their voices heard in French, and also an increased interest in languages among all students, both French and students’ different mother tongues. This has been further confirmed by a study carried out by Jared et al. (2011). In their 4-year longitudinal study they have presented evidence of the biliteracy development effects since preschool in French immersion programs. In this way, teachers could create a space for multilingualism and multiliteracy, where children’s diverse backgrounds constitute potential for development of both language and knowledge.

7. Implications

Bearing the previous in mind, an implication of the current research study is that L2 language teachers need to develop fundamental second language literacy. It is worthwhile highlighting that it has been possible to foster overall second language literacy development among primary school children. Their initial negative attitudes have required time-consuming EFL sessions analyses, resorting to an action-plan, budgeting in buying children’s literature so as to change their negative attitudes and to motivate second language reading and writing development. Therefore, our own understanding of language awareness demands that both L2 teachers and children create awareness about different languages and about different ways to use language orally and in written forms. This requires, primarily, that L2 teachers themselves develop language awareness and acquire specific training to teach English to such young children, that is, they begin to see a multitude of ways language is used, not least in the type of multilingual and multimedia society that characterizes the world today. This might be achieved through children’s literature, thus including songs, music, pictures and films.

In addition, considering the findings across the four grades of primary school and in agreement with the recommendations of the Council of Europe, the authors strongly argue that primary children attending L2 reading and writing lessons in primary schools should be entitled to learn at least one more language besides their mother tongue, through L2 age-appropriate motivating approaches.

Although the present study has depicted EFL implementation in Portuguese state schools in its contemporary scenario, the relatively small sample limits the generalizations that can be made to other contexts. Nonetheless it must be pointed out that the findings do resonate results from other quantitative studies related to the second language literacy development and of language minority students, as in the case of immigrant, young English language learners in the United States (i.e., August and Shanahan 2006).

Second, although the findings are mainly qualitative, this study also applied previously validated protocols in the literature such as the “Leuven involvement scale” (Laevens 1994). This strengthens the value of the qualitative data while supporting the view that positive attitudes hold close links with children’s overall second language literacy development, even for children who live in low-SES communities. Through the findings of the present study in a specific context, it is possible to suggest that:

1. Children’s literature, cartoons, strategies resorting to language play (i.e., drama, pretend-play, music) are powerful pedagogic tools to use whenever possible with young learners, especially economically disadvantaged children. In terms of storybooks, besides their motivational interactive nature and being authentic sources of the language, they allow cross-curricular
work with primary key curriculum themes, thus enhancing meaningful learning. Children’s literature assists as an outstanding vehicle to help second language reading and writing, from ages as young as 6 years old.

2. As well as children from mid- and high-SES, children from low-SES areas should also be entitled to democratic L2 reading and writing practices and endowed with “learning how to learn” skills. As a consequence, some key implications occur.

The first is that the present study supports the findings from research associating the negative effects of poverty and L2 literacy development, thus suggesting specific pedagogy tools to counteract those “damaging effects” and thus enhancing second language literacy development. Content goals were arranged with parts of the syllabus, which can be divided in (1) language structures and (2) topics and situations. If we were to compare both primary groups uniquely from a second language literacy development point of view, the foreign language literacy behaviors of younger primary children were much more “naturally occurring”, thus supporting previous research studies in that the stronger these skills are in the preschool years, the better children’s reading performance will be (Treiman et al. 2016; Lucas et al. 2020).

Thus, and addressing the first research question, as the matter of fact, the lack of appropriate teacher training opportunities for teaching English to young learners negatively impacts on primary school students’ English language reading and writing achievement, attested by the collected data; these data appear to verify that the application of traditional testing methods, with a focus on the learning of isolated vocabulary, causes failure, and impacts negatively on learners’ willingness to learn English.

Regarding the second research question—to what extent is using picturebooks/storybooks effective in motivating young English language learners, thus having a positive impact in strengthening the connections in English language reading and writing? The present study demonstrates positive results for implementing innovative L2 pedagogic approaches among primary school Portuguese English-language learners (ELs).

Therefore, for an effective L2 pedagogy on the use of children’s storybooks, it is critical for teachers to keep curricular and instructional practices that promote L2 reading and writing development updated, and obtain further training through CLIL and English across the curriculum. Teachers can apply a teaching–learning cycle that progresses from deconstruction through joint construction to independent construction, providing students with scaffolding on various combinations of different modes and their meaning potentials as semiotic systems (Creese 2005; Csizér and Dörnyei 2005; Rose and Martin 2012; Unsworth and Mills 2018). Taking into account that the quality of children’s L2 literature instruction demands an awareness of its potential, it is necessary for L2 teachers to develop expertise in evidence-based and well-designed curricula with an open mind about new reading and writing practices.

This type of L2 pedagogy can certainly provide opportunities for L2 learners to develop a level of communicative competence that is essential to the increasingly multilingual society we live in.

Funding: This research receives no extra funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest
Appendix A. Key Principles of Content for Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL)

| Key Principles of Content for Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Additional-language instruction is more effective when integrated with content instruction |
| 2. Explicit and systematic language instruction is important |
| 3. Student engagement is the engine of learning |
| 4. Both languages should have equally high status |
| 5. The first language can be a useful tool for learning the additional language and new academic knowledge and skills |
| 6. Classroom-based assessment is critical for programme success |
| 7. All children can become bilingual |
| 8. Strong leadership is critical for successful dual-language teaching |

Appendix B. Design of a Cross-Curricular Approach to Teach Second Language Reading and Writing

Appendix C. (Translated into English). English in Primary State Schools—1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Grades

Paddington bear, who lives and travels all over England, would like very much to know what you think about English because he is a very curious bear. He is willing to visit Portugal, but in order to do that he needs your sincere opinion.

Will you help me helping him?

1. Why do you think you learn English?
2. What are your first three favourite school subjects?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

3. What are the school subjects (if any) that you don’t like?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

4. What do you enjoy the most in English classes?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

5. What do you like the less in English classes?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

6. If you were the teacher what would you do differently?
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

References
Al-Mansour, Nasser Saleh, and Ra’ed Abdulgader Al-Shorman. 2011. The effect of teacher’s storytelling aloud on the reading comprehension of Saudi elementary stage students. *Journal of King Saud University-Languages and Translation* 23: 69–76. [CrossRef]

Al-Momani, Ibrahim A., Fathi M. Ihmeideh, and Abdallah M. Abu Naba’h. 2010. Teaching Reading in the early years: Exploring home and kindergarten relationships. *Early Child Development and Care* 180: 767–85. [CrossRef]

Aram, Dorit, and Shira Biron. 2004. Joint storybook reading and joint writing interventions among low-SES preschoolers: Differential contributions to early literacy. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 19: 588–610. [CrossRef]

Arikan, Arda, and Hayriye Taraf. 2010. Contextualizing young learners’ English lessons with cartoons: Focus on grammar and vocabulary. *Procedia Social Behavioural Sciences* 2: 5212–15. [CrossRef]

August, Diane, and Timothy Shanahan. 2006. *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers Mahwah.

Bogdan, Robert C., and Sari K. Biklen. 1998. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Boudersa, Nassira. 2016. The Importance of Teachers’ Training Programs and Professional Development in the Algerian Educational Context: Toward Informed and Effective Teaching Practices. *Expériences Pédagogiques*. Available online: http://exp-pedago.ens-oran.dz (accessed on 30 September 2020).

British Educational Research Association. 2018. *BERA’s Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. PE Scholar, UK. Available online: https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018 (accessed on 30 September 2020).

Burstall, Claire. 1975a. Factors affecting foreign-language learning: A consideration of some research findings. *Language Teaching and Linguistics: Abstracts* 8: 5–25. [CrossRef]

Burstall, Claire. 1975b. French in the primary school: The British experiment. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 31: 388–402.

Carmel, Rivi. 2019. Parents’ discourse on English for young learners. In *Language Teaching Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. [CrossRef]

Copland, Fiona, Sue Garton, and Anne Burns. 2014. Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Global Perspectives and Local Realities. *TESOL Quarterly* 48. [CrossRef]

Council of Europe. 1995. White Paper on Education and Training. Teaching and Learning towards the Learning Society. Available online: www.europa.eu/documents/comm/white_paperspdf/com95_390_en.pdf (accessed on 5 April 2010).
Council of Europe. 2001. *Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Teaching, Learning, Assessment.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Council of Europe. 2004. *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity 2004–2006: An action plan 2004–2006.* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, ISBN 92-894-6626-X.

Council of Europe. 2007. *Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Council of Europe. 2010. *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue.* Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Available online: www.coe.int/t/dkg/intercultural/Source/White%20Paper_final_revised_EN.pdf (accessed on 5 June 2010).

Coyle, Do, and Philip Hood. 2010. *CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Creese, Angela. 2005. *Is this content-based language teaching?* Linguistics and Education 16: 188–204. [CrossRef]

Crystal, David. 2003. *English as a Global Language.* London: British Council.

Creese, Carmen, Philip Hood, and Doreen Coyle. 2020. *Blossoming in English: Preschool Children’s Emergent Literacy Skills in English.* Journal of Research in Childhood Education. [CrossRef]

Csizér, Katiya, and Zoltán Dörnyei. 2005. The internal structure of language learning motivation and its relationship with language choice and learning effort. *The Modern Language Journal* 89: 19–36. [CrossRef]

Cummins, Jim. 1991. Interdependence of first- and second-language proficiency in bilingual children. In *Language Processing in Bilingual Children.* Edited by Ellen Bialystok. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 70–89.

Cummins, Jim. 2006. *Identity texts: The imaginative construction of self through multiliteracies pedagogy.* In *Imaging Multilingual Schools: Languages in Education and Glocalization.* Edited by O. Garcia, T. Skutnabb-Kangas and M.E. Torres-Guzmán. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 51–61.

Doyle, Mary A. 2013. Clay’s Theoretical Perspective: A Literacy Processing Theory. In *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading,* 6th ed. Edited by Donna Alvermann, Norman Unrau and Robert Rudell. Newark: International Reading Associations, pp. 636–56.

Duke, Nell, Victoria Purcell-Gates, Leigh Hall, and Cathy Tower. 2006. Authentic Literacy Activities for Developing Comprehension and Writing. *The Reading Teacher* 60: 344–55. [CrossRef]

Ellis, Gail, and Jean Brewster. 2014. *Picture book reading with young children: A conceptual framework.* *Developmental Review* 25: 64–103. [CrossRef]

Ellis, Gail, and Jean Brewster. 2014. *Tell it Again! The Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers.* Boston: Lifelong Books.

Fletcher, Kathryn, and Elaine Reese. 2005. Picture book reading with young children: A conceptual framework. *Developmental Review* 25: 64–103. [CrossRef]

Frias, Raquel J. 2014. O Desenvolvimento das Competências de Leitura e Escrita no Ensino Pré-Escolar—O Contributo da Consciência Fonológica. Mestrado em Didática da Língua Portuguesa, Escola Superior de Educação, Instituto Politécnico de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal.

Gentry, Richard. 2010. *Raising Confident Readers: How to Teach Your Child to Read and Write—from Baby to Age 7.* Boston: Lifelong Books.

Gobël, Kerstin, and Andreas Helmke. 2010. Intercultural learning in English as foreign language instruction: The importance of teachers’ intercultural experience and the usefulness of precise instructional directives. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26: 1571–82. [CrossRef]

Helot, Christine, and Andrea Young. 2006. Imagining Multilingual Education in France: A Language and Cultural Awareness Project at Primary Level. *Imagining Multilingual Schools Multilingual Matters,* 69–90. [CrossRef]

Huang, Becky H. 2016. A synthesis of empirical research on the linguistic outcomes of early foreign language instruction. *International Journal of Multilingualism* 13: 257–73. [CrossRef]

Jared, Debra, Pierre Cormier, Bethy A. Levy, and Lesly Wade-Woolley. 2011. Early predictors of biliteracy development in children in French immersion: A 4-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 103: 119–39. [CrossRef]

Justice, Laura, Joan Kaderavek, Xitao Fan, and Aileen Hunt. 2009. *Accelerating Preschoolers’ Early Literacy Development Through Classroom-Based Teacher–Child Storybook Reading and Explicit Print Referencing.* *Journal Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools* 40: 67–85. [CrossRef]

Korat, Ofra. 2005. Contextual and non-contextual knowledge in emergent literacy development: A comparison between children from low SES and middle SES communities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 20: 220–38. [CrossRef]

Laevers, Ferne. 1994. *The Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children LIS-YC.* Manual: Centre for Experiential Education.

Lucas, Carmen, Philip Hood, and Doreen Coyle. 2020. *Blossoming in English: Preschool Children’s Emergent Literacy Skills in English.* Journal of Research in Childhood Education. [CrossRef]
Macedo, Donald, Bessie Dendrinos, and Panayota Gounari. 2006. *A Hegemonia da Língua Inglesa*. Edições Pedagogo. Porto: Editora Bertrand.

MacIntyre, Peter D., Susan C. Baker, Richard Clément, and Sarah Conrod. 2001. Willingness to communicate, social support and language learning orientations of immersion students. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 23: 369–88. [CrossRef]

MacIntyre, Peter D., Susan C. Baker, Richard Clément, and Leslie A. Donovan. 2003. Talking in order to learn: Willingness to communicate and intensive language programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 59: 589–607. [CrossRef]

MacIntyre, Peter, Richard Clément, Zoltán Dörnyei, and Kimberly Noels. 2012. *A Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate in a L2: A Situational Model of L2 Confidence and Affiliation*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Mehigan, Gene. 2020. Effects of Fluency Oriented Instruction on Reading Achievement and Motivation among Struggling Readers in First Class in Irish Primary Schools. Ph.D. thesis, Department of Education, Faculty of Arts, National University of Ireland, University College, Cork, Ireland.

Miles, B. Mathew, and A. Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Ministry of Education. 2005. Programa de Generalização de Inglês no Ensino Básico–3.º e 4.º anos de Escolaridade. Portugal [Programme for the Generalization of English in Primary Schools-3rd and 4th Years of Schooling]. Available online: http://www.mne.gov.pt/Portal/PT/Governos_Constitucionais/CC17/ME/Comunicacao/Outros_Documentos/20050705_ME_Doc_Ingles_Basico.htm (accessed on 10 November 2005).

Ministry of Education. 2006. Programa de Generalização de Inglês no Ensino Básico–1.º e 2.º anos de Escolaridade. Portugal. [Programme for the Generalization of English in Primary Schools–1st and 2nd Years of Schooling]. Despacho n.º 12 590/2006. Diário da República n.º115, II série (). Portuguese Law no 12 590/2006 Diary of Republic no 115, II Series. Available online: https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Basico/AEC/desp_12591_2006.pdf (accessed on 10 November 2005).

Ministry of Education. 2018. Inglês: Documentos Curriculares de Referência. Available online: https://www.dge.mec.pt/ingles (accessed on 20 September 2020).

Mourão, Sandie. 2015a. Learning English Is Child’s Play—How to Leave Them to It. *Voices*. Available online: https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/learning-english-childs-play (accessed on 8 December 2020).

Mourão, Sandie. 2015b. The potential of picturebooks with young learners. In *Teaching English to Young Learners*. Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3–12 years old. Edited by J. Bland. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Mourão, Sandie, and Sónia Ferreirinha. 2016. Early language learning in Portugal. Unpublished Report. Available online: http://www.appi.pt/activeapp/wpcontent/uploads/2016/07/Pre-primary-survey-report-July-FINAL-rev.pdf (accessed on 20 September 2020).

Mourão, Sandie, and Mónica Lourenço. 2015. *Early Years Second Language Education: International Perspectives on Theories and Practice*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Newman, Susan. 2016. Opportunities to Learn Give Children a Fighting Chance. *Journal Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice* 65: 113–23. [CrossRef]

Nikolov, Marianne. 1999. ‘Why do you learn English?’ ‘Because the teacher is short.’ A study of Hungarian children’s foreign language learning motivation. *Language Teaching Research* 3: 33–56. [CrossRef]

Nunan, David. 1999. *Teaching Young Language Learners (Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Purcell-Gates, Victoria, Nell Duke, and Joseph Martineau. 2007. Learning to Read and Write Genre-Specific Text: Roles of Authentic Experience and Explicit Teaching. *Reading Research Quarterly* 42: 18–45. [CrossRef]

Ritchey, Kristen, and Deborah L. Speece. 2006. From Letter Names to Word Reading: The Nascent Role of Sublexical Fluency. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 31: 301–27. [CrossRef]

Rivers, Damian, and Brian Mcmillan. 2011. The Practice of Policy: Teacher Attitudes toward “English Only”. *System* 39: 251–63.
Rose, David, and J. R. Martin. 2012. *Learning to Write, Reading to Learn: Genre, Knowledge and Pedagogy in the Sydney School*. London: Equinox.

Saracho, Olivia, and Bernard Spodek. 2010. Parents and children engaging in storybook reading. *Journal Early Child Development and Care* 180. [CrossRef]

Silva, Maria V. 2012. Gêneros textuais e ensino-aprendizagem de línguas: um estudo sobre as crenças de alunos-professores de Letras/Lingua Inglesa. Dissertação (Mestrado em Linguística Aplicada), Universidade Estadual do Ceará, Ceará, Brasil.

Strauss, Anselm, and Juliet Corbin. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.

Sulzby, Elizabeth. 1992. Transitions from Emergent to Conventional Writing (Research Directions). *Language Arts* 69: 290–97.

Tannenbaum, Michal, and Limor Tahar. 2008. Willingness to communicate in the language of the other: Jewish and Arab students in Israel. *Learning and Instruction* 18: 283–94. [CrossRef]

Taylor, Barbara, Debra Pearson, and Michael Rodriguez. 2003. Reading Growth in High-Poverty Classrooms: The Influence of Teacher Practices That Encourage Cognitive Engagement in Literacy Learning. *The Elementary School Journal* 104. [CrossRef]

Tolentino, Efleda, and Lauren Lawson. 2015. ‘Well, we’re going to kindergarten, so we’re gonna need business cards!’: A story of preschool emergent readers and writers and the transformation of identity. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 17: 47–68. [CrossRef]

Treiman, Rebecca. 2005. Knowledge about letters as a foundation for reading and spelling. In *Handbook of Orthography and Literacy*. Edited by M.R. Joshi and G.P. Aaron. Mahwah: Erlbaum.

Treiman, Rebecca, and Victor Broderick. 1998. What’s in a name? Children’s knowledge of letters in their own names. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 70: 97–116. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Treiman, Rebecca, Ruth Tincoff, Kira Rodriguez, Angeliki Mouzaki, and D.J. Francis. 1998. The foundations of literacy: Learning the sounds of letters. *Child Development* 69: 1524–40. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Treiman, Rebecca, Brett Kessler, Tatiana C. Pollo, Brian Byrne, and Richard K. Olson. 2016. Measures of kindergarten spelling and their relations to later spelling performance. *Scientific Studies of Reading* 20: 349–62. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Unsworth, Len, and Kathy Mills. 2018. Multimodal Literacy. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. [CrossRef]

Vee, Harris. 2008. A cross-curricular approach to ‘learning to learn’ languages: Government policy and practice. *Curriculum Journal* 19: 255–68.

Vygotsky, Lev S. 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, Mass. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wedin, Asa. 2010. *Wedin, Asa 2010. Narration in Swedish pre and primary school: A resource for language development and multilingualism*. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 23: 219–33. [CrossRef]

Yang, Hsueh-Yin, and Zhu Hua. 2010. The phonological development of a trilingual child. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 14: 105–26. [CrossRef]

Yesil-Dagli, Ummuhan. 2011. Predicting ELL Students’ Beginning First Grade English Oral Reading Fluency from Initial Kindergarten Vocabulary, Letter Naming, and Phonological Awareness Skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 26: 15–29. [CrossRef]

Yum, Yen Na, Neil Cohn, and Way Kwok-Wai Lau. 2021. Effects of picture-word integration on reading visual narratives in L1 and L2. *Journal Learning and Instruction* 71. [CrossRef]

Zhang, Jianying, and Jiren Liu. 2018. The Effects of Extensive Reading on English Vocabulary Learning: A Meta-analysis. *Journal English Language Teaching* 11: 1–15. [CrossRef]

Publisher’s Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

© 2020 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).