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APPLYING MONTESSORI PRINCIPLES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Abstract: *This paper inquires into the potential application of Maria Montessori’s educational philosophy, the Montessori Method, in foreign language instruction. Originating in the early 20th century, this method prioritizes hands-on experiences, active learning, and freedom in teaching. Despite the success of the Montessori Method in general education, its adaptation to foreign language learning has not been standardized in terms of materials or guidelines. The absence of a specific framework for language instruction within Montessori schools prompts exploration. Therefore, this paper provides an overview of Montessori pedagogy with a focus on language instruction, analysing existing research on incorporating Montessori principles into English language teaching. The aim is to assess the efficacy of this method in language education, considering its strengths and challenges, and advocating for further research to refine its application. The exploration of Montessori principles in language instruction contributes to the ongoing discourse on innovative approaches to language learning and teaching.*

Keywords: *alternative approach, educational philosophy, language teaching methodology*

INTRODUCTION

In today’s world, the English language has become the primary means of communication, and it is common for it to be learned as a first foreign

language from an early age. The methodology for language learning at an early age should cater to the overall development of a child, particularly as “language development arises from their entire experience, knowledge and competences” (Goullier et al., 2015, p. 12). In this endeavour, various English language teaching methods, such as Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, Communicative Language Teaching, etc., have been tested, attempted, and are available. In the early 20th century, Maria Montessori established the Montessori Method of Education. This method has inspired many education experts, teachers, educators, and parents worldwide who considered it an appropriate response to the developmental needs of children. The fundamental principles of the Montessori Method reflect several alternative methods that were popular in Europe during that period, including hands-on experience, active learning, freedom for children and teachers, and the abandonment of strict conventional teaching methods (Matijević, 2001).

However, while the Montessori Method offers a standardized set of materials for *free work*¹ in different areas such as mathematics, geography, and the school’s primary language, there is no standardized set of Montessori materials for foreign language learning. Maria Montessori, the creator and founder of the approach, never developed such material or an elaborate concept for foreign language learning in Montessori schools (Lillard, 2007, pp. 333–334). Nevertheless, learning a foreign language is part of the curriculum in Montessori schools, and various models, such as dual teacher language, immersion and L2 corner, are used. Bilingual education programs (immersion), for instance, are frequently applied during *free work* (Winnefeld, 2012). The Montessori Method, which involves an individualized approach to each child, holistic development, a stimulating environment, freedom, and responsibility, represents interesting principles for language instruction. However, for a better understanding of the position of a foreign language within this type of education, the basic principles of the Montessori Method should be laid out.

This paper provides an overview of the Montessori pedagogy and principles, Montessori materials and Montessori materials for language learning. Additionally, the paper analyses research on incorporating principles of the Montessori Method into English language teaching. The aim is to explore the research outcomes to establish how they align with Montessori principles and contemporary language learning principles.

MONTESSORI PEDAGOGY AND PRINCIPLES

The pedagogy of Maria Montessori arises from scientific observations of children’s spontaneous learning, encouragement of their activities, and respect

¹ The individual and independent learning cycles called *free work* are suggested to take place “uninterrupted” and for approximately three hours every day (Association Montessori Internationale 2010; Lillard, 2014).

for their independence. Montessori recognizes and values the holistic image of the child, with the fundamental principle being to support the child in all developmental stages of physical, psychological, and spiritual growth (Philipps, 1999). In this attempt, education plays a significant role. In the annotated version of the book "The Montessori Method", Gerald Lee Gutek (2004, p. 79) echoes Maria Montessori's criticism of the school system, asserting that children suffer from tools that disturb their bodies and minds. She mentioned how desks, rewards, and punishments establish discipline only in the classroom, resulting in a lack of mobility and silence. She believed that such methods hinder children's learning and development.

According to Lillard (2014), there are three fundamental principles of Montessori education: the prepared environment, the educated teacher, and the child's freedom and the development of discipline. Each of these principles is briefly outlined in the following section.

According to Maria Montessori, the prepared environment goes beyond mere classroom arrangements; it encompasses carefully designed spaces and specific teacher behaviours that facilitate independent learning and foster children's natural curiosity and physical, mental, and spiritual development (Philipps, 1999). Learning materials are adapted to stimulate development. They are organized by complexity, guiding the child through various exercises. Montessori materials adhere to strict standards and encourage independent learning. Montessori suggested that the prepared environment symbolizes freedom and serves as an educational tool, allowing children to choose comfortable ways of play or work. Research in neuropsychology supports the idea that the environment influences learning, emphasizing the importance of allowing children free movement for exploration and learning (Jechura et al., 2016; Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996; van Liempd, et al., 2020). A well-prepared environment not only facilitates independent work but also enables teachers to focus on smaller groups or individual students, promoting calm and balanced learning. In a Montessori classroom, tables and chairs are movable and tailored to the child's size, with additional workspaces such as small tables or carpets. The space is aesthetically decorated with real photographs, artworks, and children's creations, encouraging spacious, free movement. Plants and a classroom pet contribute to a nurturing atmosphere. Open shelving makes self-directed work materials accessible while emphasizing the need for cleanliness and the ability to teach children responsibility.

Furthermore, the prepared environment should be a harmonious, unified entity, not just a collection of different items. It enables children to joyfully discover the world through experiments, emphasizing the importance of care and responsibility in handling materials (Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996). Additionally, Montessori pedagogy stresses the importance of establishing a proper working environment. This implies that children concentrate on their

work, and encourage and help each other in a peaceful and relaxed environment rather than in a noisy classroom filled with aggression and competition for a better position (Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996). The premise is that when a child feels good in their environment, is not afraid, and is allowed to make mistakes to find the right solution independently, they will be able to seize the opportunity for free choice (Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996).

In Montessori schools, the role of the teacher significantly differs from that in conventional schools. Montessori's principle of the educated teacher emphasizes a shift from direct instruction to facilitating student exploration and independent learning. Instead of being a transmitter of knowledge, the Montessori teacher acts as an organizer and assistant in the learning process. The teacher provides initial instructions, allowing children to work independently on activities. Occasionally, the teacher offers guidance, motivates, and demonstrates how to use materials. Therefore, the Montessori teacher functions as an indirect leader, supporting children in building their personalities, finding their own rhythm, making decisions, and achieving independence (Philipps, 1999).

Since Montessori pedagogy is child-centered, adapting methods and content to the child's needs, children freely choose materials and decide how long and how often they will work with them (Matijević, 2001). Although the teacher can suggest activities, if children accept them, the teacher steps back. In addition to independently choosing materials, children work at their own pace, with the freedom to determine the order and duration of activities. Positive empowerment, encouragement, and freedom of choice are crucial, along with a cheerful and gentle approach. Individual work is common, and the teacher refrains from imposing a specific approach or immediately correcting mistakes. Instead, the teacher allows the child to notice and correct errors independently, encouraging independence and critical thinking.

The teacher's speech, gestures, and presentations should be careful, calm, and patient, with an awareness of their impact on children's behaviour. Good communication skills, especially with parents, are of utmost importance. The teacher needs to understand Montessori theory, the child's developmental period, and sensitive periods to meet the child's needs and encourage independent learning.

Montessori pedagogy embraces the principle of a child's freedom and development of discipline, encouraging self-reliance through the motto "Help me do it myself!". Maria Montessori observed that children do not want to be served but desire independence. Children want to learn but prefer to do it on their own. The teacher's role is to help the child become independent by allowing the child to make and correct mistakes independently. In Montessori schools, discipline must stem from freedom. Montessori suggested that children should be given more freedom both in school and in everyday life (Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996). According to Philipps (1999), Montessori considered freedom as the

inner freedom of action and movement inherent in all people. Montessori's method liberates the child from things that limit their spontaneity. Children are encouraged to become independent. Instead of providing external guidance, the teacher guides the child indirectly, granting autonomy. Montessori believed that a child is free when familiar with their environment. Working with materials in the Montessori environment teaches the child to connect with reality and encourages their willingness to commit. By systematically encouraging commitment, the teacher influences the child's development of the ability to act freely. Providing the child with freedom is achieved by creating a prepared environment where they can reach desired goals. However, freedom must be learned; it is a developmental process in which one learns independence, discipline, and responsibility. Responsibility refers to discipline and self-control (Philipps, 1999). If the child is given the freedom to choose activities and manages to finish them independently, they practice decision-making and build autonomy and independence.

However, freedom must not be misunderstood; giving the child freedom does not mean that everything is allowed; in contrast, freedom requires significant boundaries (Schäfer, 2015). The child is confronted with these boundaries in the limited number of materials and in the prepared environment divided into workstations. Therefore, the child is given freedom in an environment created for them to explore their limits. According to Philipps (1999), we need freedom to practice responsibility and need the ability to be responsible to be truly free. Parents and teachers should exhibit discipline and responsibility as children consider them role models, learning from their example what freedom entails and how to live in a state of freedom.

MONTESSORI MATERIALS

Montessori classrooms are equipped with specially designed materials made from various substances such as wood, leather, paper, metal, etc. (Philipps, 1999). Maria Montessori relied on the design of these didactic materials, drawing from her observations of children and the works of Itard and Séguin². The classroom environment should be organized and adapted to the child's needs and the basic psychological needs of children include movement, order, language, and love for the environment. To meet these needs,

² Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard (1774–1838), a French physician noted for his work with the deaf and with the *wild boy of Aveyron*. Itard was one of the first to attempt the instruction of intellectually disabled children on a scientific basis. In "Rapports sur le sauvage de l'Aveyron" (1807; Reports on the Savage of Aveyron), he explained the methods that he used (1801–1805) in trying to train and educate an unsocialized 11-year-old boy who had been found in a forest in Aveyron, south of Paris. Edouard Séguin (1812–1880), a French-born American psychiatrist who pioneered modern educational methods for teaching the severely intellectually disabled. As a young doctor, he worked with psychologists Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard and Jean-Étienne-Dominique Esquirol.

each Montessori classroom should have materials for everyday life (cleaning materials, tools, buttons, etc.), materials for motor development, materials for sensory development (especially touch and hearing), language materials, and mathematical materials (Matijević, 2001). These materials are color-coded and neatly arranged in the classroom so that children can easily find and access them, however, there is only one set of each material in the Montessori classroom (Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996). According to the authors, if a child wants to work with a particular material and notices that someone else is using it, the child faces a choice; the child can either wait for the other child to finish the activity, join the activity, or postpone the activity for the next day. In this way, children learn how to organize their time and practice patience.

Furthermore, each set of Montessori materials includes the ability to recognize mistakes (Philipps, 1999), and this ability to recognize mistakes is an important principle of Montessori pedagogy. The material is designed so that children can find the solution or the path to the solution independently through direct or indirect error control (Philipps, 1999). A child learns by making mistakes and can solve a task only if he or she has correctly completed all previous tasks. It is crucial to provide the child with the opportunity to notice the mistake on their own. Recognizing and correcting mistakes educates the child and is a prerequisite for careful, independent, and concentrated work.

MONTESSORI MATERIALS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Most materials follow the three-period lesson principle, aiding children in learning vocabulary and concepts through three distinct phases: 1) naming or introducing the object by the teacher; 2) recognizing or identifying the object by the child; and 3) naming or remembering the name of the object by the child. Owing to a scarcity of literature on teaching a foreign language in a Montessori school, the following paragraphs introduce some of the Montessori materials and activities for teaching a primary language.

The development of strong listening skills is crucial for language acquisition, and varied materials and activities can support this development. Britton (1995) described a Montessori activity called the Silence Game, which was designed to enhance listening skills. Maria Montessori initially developed this activity while working with partially deaf children. In the game, the teacher softly calls out the name of each child in turn, and when the child hears their name, they quietly move to the teacher. By requiring careful listening and maintaining silence, this activity improves auditory awareness in children.

Montessori schools utilize various materials and activities for the development of speaking skills. According to Philipps (1999), pictures are frequently used in Montessori schools to teach new vocabulary. Pictures are

categorized on the basis of concepts found in the human environment, the world of animals and plants. Unknown names of objects, animals, and plants are introduced through the three-period lesson concept. Prior to this, children learn vocabulary through rhymes, poems, verses, picture books, and books shown during circle time or on the basis of individual preferences. Another speaking activity mentioned by Britton (1995) is the Object Game employed when a child is learning letter sounds. This activity helps the child identify and analyse different sounds. While described for practicing the mother tongue in the book, it can be adapted for a foreign language class. The game involves two groups of objects, each starting with a different letter. The teacher points to objects one at a time, saying the word and ensuring that the child hears the beginning sound clearly. The teacher then combines objects from both groups, repeating the process. The teacher picks up an object and says, "I spy with my little eye something else beginning with [letter]", prompting the child to choose another object with the same initial sound. This activity enhances a child's ability to recognize sounds in words.

Montessori classrooms encourage early writing development through different writing materials and activities. Sandpaper letters stand out as widely recognized Montessori tools for language acquisition. These letters, divided into red consonants and blue vowels, are cut out of sandpaper glued on wooden tiles. Children trace the letters with their index fingers, memorizing their shapes. This tactile approach allows the child to learn how to write before understanding the meanings of the letters. The Montessori Method emphasizes feeling individual letters first, followed by composing words and sentences (Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996). Additionally, metal frames and inserts of various shapes, such as geometric frames, indirectly prepare the child for writing. By outlining shapes on paper and filling them in, children learn how to control a pencil and practice making lines and curves, which is essential for later writing (Philipps, 1999).

In a Montessori school, at the age of four, when the child has just acquired the ability to write, he or she will be inspired to use this skill repeatedly (Philipps, 1999). However, if the child likes to have free will, he or she will not be as happy to write dictations as when he or she can choose a picture or an object and write about it to the tiniest details. The Montessori teacher can fulfil this will to write by preparing cards and pictures as prompts for writing; it does not matter how complicated the words are, the child will be happy to copy them (Philipps, 1999). Additionally, at this point, it does not matter if the child can read what he wrote. It is enough if the teacher reads the word; the child starts with 'total reading' when he or she masters writing completely (Philipps, 1999).

Diverse reading materials and activities are used to develop early literacy skills. The child starts to learn how to read by matching small objects with cards that have the names of the objects written on them, followed by matching

cards with pictures with cards with written words (Philipps, 1999). The child can check his answers by looking at the picture cards with words written under the pictures. Furthermore, to practice reading, a child is given tasks that he must read and then fulfil. For example, the child is given a card with the name of an object that can be found in the classroom. The child reads the word with the teacher and then finds that object in the room and places the card next to it (Philipps, 1999). Additionally, there are strings of words with highlighted letters for practicing reading. The words are put into small booklets that encourage children to read. Puzzles also serve children to solve and write down the answers (Philipps, 1999). Children read sentences that describe pictures, which inspires the child to later choose a picture and write sentences that describe the picture. The described activities show how to teach reading in an interactive and interesting way. They gradually introduce reading with pictures and games that are engaging and interesting to children. Another activity for preparing for reading is called “Moveable Alphabet” (Britton, 1995, p. 60). This activity is also helpful for practicing listening for the sounds in words. The idea of the activity is to build a word starting with the sounds and then, by putting the sounds together quickly, saying the word. The child will learn how to read by sounding out the letters. The teacher puts five sets of individual letters of the alphabet and a box of small objects in front of the child. The objects should be three-letter phonic words. The teacher asks the child to choose one of the objects and then asks him/her what sounds he/she can hear in that word. When the child says the sound, the teacher asks him/her to find that sound among the letters. The teacher then asks what sound comes next in the word, and when the child says it, the teacher asks him/her to find that letter. When the child finds all the letters from the word, the teacher builds the word in front of the child and reads it to the child.

In a Montessori school, language instruction follows a sequence of speaking, writing, and, finally, reading. This progression mirrors the natural development of language skills in children. To support this sequence, Montessori educators utilize four distinct categories of materials. The first group lays the groundwork for literacy skills, preparing children for the act of reading and writing. The second group focuses on comprehension, immersing children in reading materials and fostering understanding. The third group introduces children to the fundamental building blocks of language, the various parts of speech. Finally, the fourth group delves into the analysis of reading materials and sentence structure analysis.

The effectiveness of these materials depends on their proper presentation and timing. Montessori materials serve as tools for children to explore language, helping them expand, deepen, and comprehend the language they are learning (Buczynski et al., 2019). Using tangible language materials, a child can enhance vocabulary and grasp the intricacies of both their native language

and, eventually, a foreign language (Seitz & Hallwachs, 1996). Montessori-designed materials encourage speaking, naming, describing, composing words with letters, and practicing writing. These materials encompass a wide range, from metal shapes and inserts to discussions about the prepared environment, engaging in practical life exercises, working with sensory development materials, storytelling, conversations, sandpaper letters, sound discrimination, movable alphabet, and activities related to writing, reading, word classes, grammar boxes, and sentence structure (Philipps, 1999).

APPROACHES TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN MONTESSORI SCHOOLS

As shown in the preceding section, Maria Montessori meticulously designed a standardized set of materials to cater to subjects such as mathematics, geography, everyday life, and the primary language of the school. However, she did not extend this to creating a standardized set of materials or a specific framework for foreign language learning within the Montessori school environment. Nevertheless, the integration of language learning into Montessori schools was inevitable but required a thoughtful alignment with the foundational principles of the Montessori Method.

The pedagogical approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT) at primary and pre-primary levels exhibit a spectrum of variations. This includes scenarios where English serves as the medium of instruction (EMI), immersion education, bilingual or partially bilingual education, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and the predominant model treats English as a subject with allocated lessons in the primary curriculum (Enever, 2016, p. 355). In the implementation of language learning in Montessori schools, guided by the principles of the Montessori Method, practitioners identified various models (Chavarría, 2021).

These models encompass the following: the dual teacher language model, where each language is associated with a specific adult; time allocation for both L1 and L2; immersion education where instruction occurs in the target language; target language classrooms structured with set groups or flexible times; L2 corners situated within the classroom, and blended models incorporating technology for language provision and practice. The selection of a particular model depends on the combination of social context, community needs, teacher expertise, available resources, and educational priorities (Chavarría, 2019). In general, the decision-making process on how to implement foreign language learning in Montessori schools is a collaborative effort involving teachers and management (Winnefeld, 2012).

An example of a model is the contemporary Montessori Primary School “Barunice Dedee Vranyczany”³ in Zagreb, Croatia where bilingual teaching is integrated, i.e., English is incorporated as part of the Cambridge program, covering subjects such as English, Math, and Science. These lessons are conducted within basic groups and serve as additional classes for science, taking place during the *free work* period in the morning.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative thematic analysis to explore how the Montessori Method aligns with contemporary principles of English language teaching (EAL/ESL/EFL) in pre-primary and primary education. The analysis focused on a corpus of nine research papers identified through a systematic search of academic databases. Most importantly, the chosen studies were selected on the basis on their specific focus on the application of the Montessori Method for teaching English in pre-primary or primary school settings. This ensured a focused and relevant analysis of the research topic. To ensure the research captured both established and recent findings in the field, the selection considered one study published in 1998, alongside studies published between 2009 and 2018.

The nine research papers included in this analysis⁴ can be categorized into two distinct groups (Table 1). The first group included Implementation Studies (articles 1–5). These studies directly implemented Montessori principles within their research design and aimed to assess the effectiveness of this approach in facilitating language learning. The second group included Suggested Practices Studies (articles 6–9). These studies focused on providing educators with practical guidance for incorporating Montessori values into their English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction by outlining relevant activities and strategies. While they did not necessarily assess the effectiveness of these practices through formal research, they offer valuable insights for practical implementation.

This selection process intended to cover a range of perspectives by including both implementation and suggested practices studies. However, the analysis being limited to the chosen studies may not represent the entirety of existing research on this topic.

³ <http://www.os-montessori-bdvranychany-zg.skole.hr/nastava/posebnosti>

⁴ The research papers outlined in this overview were previously employed for a similar study, however with different research objectives, conducted during the composition of the second author’s master’s thesis.

Table 1*Categorization of research papers selected for analysis*

Author(s) and year of publication	Title	Participants / Context	Country	Type of research
Handayani, S., 2014	The Implementation of Montessori Method for the Teaching of English Language at Singapore Piaget Academy International School Solo Baru.	Pre-primary learners, teachers, parents	Indonesia	descriptive, qualitative research (observations and interviews)
Jendza, J., 2016	Foreign Languages in the Montessori Environment: A Participatory Action Research – the First Cycle.	Teachers	Poland	participatory action research
Ghaffari, M., Kashkouli, S. & Moahmmadi, S. F., 2017	Montessori and Conventional Teaching Methods in Learning English as a Second/Foreign Language: An Overview	N/A	N/A	comparative study
Aktaş, C. B., 2017	Listening to Young Children: Applying Montessori's Method to English as an Additional Language (EAL) Education	Pre-primary learners	Switzerland	action research
Adisti, A. R., 2018	The Montessori's Values in Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL)	Teacher and students	Indonesia	descriptive qualitative (observation and interview)

Table 1 (continued)

Rosanova, M. J., 1997	Early Childhood Bilingualism in the Montessori Children's House: Guessable Context and the Planned Environment	Pre-primary	USA	observations
Wysmulek, I., 2009	Montessori Method in Teaching Foreign Languages	Pre-primary and primary	Ukraine	overview
Winnefeld, J., 2012	Task-based Language Learning in Bilingual Montessori Elementary Schools: Customizing Foreign Language Learning and Promoting L2 Speaking Skills	Primary (elementary school)	Germany	N/A
Akhsanova, L. & Salyakhova, G. I., 2016	English Teaching Features on the basis of Montessori System Among Preschool Age Children	Pre-primary	Russia	Reflection and observation

RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the analysis of the nine research papers exploring the use of the Montessori Method in teaching English in pre-primary and primary school settings. The results are presented according to the categorization of studies, i. e. Implementation Studies (articles 1–5), and Suggested Practices Studies (articles 6–9).

IMPLEMENTATION STUDIES

These studies directly put Montessori principles into practice within their research design, aiming to assess their effectiveness in facilitating language learning. We will delve into each study's specific applications of the Montessori Method, their chosen research methodologies, and observed outcomes related to language acquisition in early education settings.

Handayani (2014) engaged in descriptive, qualitative research, focusing on four-year-old children enrolled in the Play Group II Class at Singapore Piaget Academy International Elementary School in Solo Baru, Indonesia. The data collection process involved observing English lessons and conducting

interviews with teachers, teaching staff, students, and parents. Handayani observed the children's learning dynamics, analysing their engagement with the Montessori Method in their everyday English learning experiences at school. This encompassed examining how children interacted with learning materials, collaborated in groups, and demonstrated their academic achievements.

The observations emphasized on the learning process over the outcome, leading to the incorporation of repetition and practice in this educational approach and revealing that the school had implemented an effective technique facilitating easy English language acquisition for children. The teaching method is strategically aligned with English language lesson objectives, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

For listening activities, teachers employed dialogs, songs, poems, and reading comprehension exercises. Children practiced listening through play, conversations, poems, and singing, utilizing devices such as tape recorders, computers, and televisions. Speaking exercises involved modeling, drilling for comprehension, repetition, problem-solving, and discussions on the basis of previously heard short stories. The Montessori Method's encouragement of spontaneity and self-expression created an environment where children actively and confidently engaged in these activities without fear of errors, which is crucial for learning a foreign language.

In terms of reading, two activities were identified: drilling to enhance basic English language skills and reading library books for knowledge development. Colourful pictures and simple words in books were employed to make reading engaging for children. The study noted that children began recognizing new words, understanding sentence structures, and learning punctuation.

Writing was the most challenging aspect of English lessons for young children as it demanded both cognitive and motor skills. The researcher emphasized the importance of repetition in acquiring writing skills and highlighted the role of colourful and attractive pictures in sustaining children's interest in writing.

Handayani's findings affirmed that the Montessori Method proved highly effective in teaching English to children in playgroup classes. The study concluded that specific elements of the Montessori Method, including innate curiosity, parental support, teacher professionalism, peer influence, and the teaching methodology itself, played significant roles in fostering an exceptional and talented individual proficient in English as a second language across cognitive, motor, and social domains.

The goal of Jendza's (2016) participatory action research, which was conducted in a Montessori primary school in northern Poland, was to examine how the research participants could transcend their tacit knowledge concerning foreign language education. It also aimed to discover how the interested parties understand their own practices in the context of a given field. The research findings show that the Montessori method, complete as it may seem, contains

several issues either insufficiently explored or simply omitted by its creator. Therefore, there is a need for creative inspiration and enrichment of teaching rather than a strict application of the method. Furthermore, the Montessori's methodology of teaching foreign languages was too mechanical and lacked sufficient educational opportunities for real communication. Montessori linguistic material, in terms of foreign language teaching, was shown to be either lexically and grammatically too complex or too easy and not interesting for the children; thus, it was inadequate. The author finds this to be connected to the fact that the materials are imported from Anglo-Saxon countries and designed for learners whose mother tongue is English, which is why the materials should be customized to both children's personal needs and English language competences. Finally, the author suggested that Montessori teachers, in this school should become more familiar with general contemporary theories of education and psychology.

In their 2017 paper, Ghaffari, Kashkouli, and Sadighi presented the results of their comparative analysis of the Montessori Method and traditional teaching approaches for learning English as a second or foreign language. The primary aim of their study was to challenge existing beliefs among educators, steering them towards a focus on individualized learning and critical thinking, which constitute the core objectives of Montessori methods.

In listing the advantages of Montessori education over conventional education, the authors initially mentioned the superior academic and social outcomes produced by Montessori classrooms. For example, kindergarten graduates from Montessori programs outperform their peers in public and private schools on standardized math and reading tests. This trend continued into elementary school, where Montessori students exhibited greater creativity and depth in their essays than their peers did. Some Montessori students even demonstrated mastery of reading and writing before the age of 6. Additionally, middle school evaluations in the U.S. revealed that Montessori students reported greater affect, potency, intrinsic motivation, and flow experience, and undivided interest during school activities.

The success of Montessori education, according to the authors, stems from the role of teachers in fostering self-growth from childhood to adulthood. The Montessori approach facilitates problem-solving skills, social responsibility, time management, and overall fulfillment for students. However, the authors acknowledged certain limitations, such as the lack of formal acceptance of Montessori principles by administrators and policymakers in traditional schools. This reluctance is attributed to the method's deviation from traditional subject-based pedagogy, as well as its lack of academic assessment. Challenges such as the scarcity of trained Montessori professionals, implementation costs, and administrator resistance also restrict program expansion.

In conclusion, the authors emphasized the need for further work on student discipline and socialization. They advocate the Montessori Method's potential to enhance understanding of individual differences among English learners, especially considering environmental factors. Furthermore, the authors state that the Montessori Method has the potential to bring about some positive changes not only to our education system but also to society at large. Finally, the authors concluded that the reason why the Montessori Method is not used in all schools in the world because not every educator is familiar with the Montessori Method. This article does not mention the location of teaching English as a second language in a Montessori environment and it does not provide the context of the investigation. Additionally, the article is too general and does not provide concrete examples of teaching. Therefore, more research is needed on the information presented in the article.

In a structured action research design, Carla Aktaş (2017) set out to assess the effectiveness of the Montessori Method in teaching EAL to young preschool children within the framework of social justice. Given the heightened importance of social justice in education, particularly for young EAL students in an era of globalization, the study aimed to address the challenge of providing a socially just education to children moving to a new country and needing to learn English as a second language.

Choosing the Montessori Method as the foundation for the EAL program, the author highlighted its emphasis on social justice and the inclusion of student voices. The research took place in a preschool in the Kanton of Zürich, Switzerland, spanning fourteen lessons conducted over a fourteen-week period. To ensure accurate language development results, the researcher created a non-English speaking environment. Nine participants, each with varying exposure to English and diverse nationalities and ethnicities, participated in the study. All the lessons adhered to the Montessori Method for language instruction, with Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) objectives used to track participants' progress.

Emphasizing the significance of spoken language comprehension, the author asserted that the most effective way to learn a language involves engaging in activities such as speaking, reading, and writing. Each lesson commenced and concluded with a singing circle, fostering connections between the heard words and their meanings. To suit the participants' age and attention span, three to four activities were incorporated into each session. The results indicated that even children with no prior exposure to English presented evidence of language learning. The participants without prior English exposure demonstrated a silent period until weeks nine and twelve, after which they gradually increased their number of oral demonstrations as comfort in the learning environment increased.

Among participants with previous exposure to English, some became particularly vocal, constructing word chunks to convey meaning at the end of the study. While others engaged in conversation, those with no prior knowledge of English could answer directed questions but struggled to initiate conversations beyond making requests with one or two words. Notably, all the participants demonstrated consistent progress each month, enhancing their comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and attempts at spoken English. In conclusion, Aktaş stated that “even when children do not live in an English-speaking country, employing the Montessori Method can have positive results for English language learning” (p. 6).

Adisti’s (2018) study aimed to describe the implementation of Montessori’s values in reaching English to young learners at Aisyiyah Kindergarten in Karanganyar, Indonesia, using a descriptive qualitative method. The participants were preschool-aged children whose mother tongue was Indonesian. The researcher discovered that the application of Montessori’s values in teaching increased students’ interest and enthusiasm in learning English. The author concluded that when given the freedom to choose activities to their liking, the students enjoyed the activities more and were more active, independent, and responsible for what they learned. However, the author found some weaknesses in applying Montessori’s values, such as the difficulty in controlling student achievement results because there was no testing in Montessori schools, and the requirement of a highly creative approach from a teacher in applying Montessori’s values so that the students do not become bored with free activities all the time.

SUGGESTED PRACTICES STUDIES

The following section reveals the range of practical suggestions and activities outlined in each study, providing insights into how educators can adapt the Montessori Method to enrich the language learning experience for their EFL students.

Rosanova’s (1997) paper explored the language immersion approach implemented by the Intercultural Montessori School in Oak Park, Illinois, which caters to children aged 2 to 6. Following the Canadian immersion model, teachers refrained from using the majority language for the initial three years of the program, aiming to foster bilingualism. The majority of the students were native English speakers, with a minority exposed to various target languages such as Spanish, French, Italian, and Japanese.

On the basis of eleven years of experience, Mike Rosanova asserted that children who are neurologically and emotionally sound, come from supportive families, and consistently experience a second language immersion Montessori environment, typically do not remain monolingual. The author introduced four

developmental stages within a Montessori community: pre-production, early production, speech emergence, and intermediate fluency. In the pre-production stage, children (3 to 6 years old) initially avoid speaking the target language, focusing on developing a receptive vocabulary through social and cognitive strategies. Although easily distracted, they understand the language and respond through gestures or nods. The curriculum emphasizes accuracy and contextual cues, with a focus on practical life, motor development, grace and courtesy, sensorial, and basic math materials.

In the early production stage, older children mentor younger children, and children begin producing simple words and short phrases. Their interest in books in the target language grows, and they show a preference for stories known in English. The curriculum has expanded to include reading and writing materials, with children capable of constructing two-word strings in the target language.

The third year involves further development, with children mastering letters and engaging in more advanced work. While gaps and errors persist, children can participate in class discussions and work with grammar materials. For example, children at this stage can understand and engage with materials related to nouns and adjectives. The curriculum also introduces variations and extensions of basic materials.

The final stage, intermediate fluency, involves cooperative work, with older children serving as powerful models for younger children. Children in their third year, ages five and six, have usually mastered most of the letters of the alphabet and first-level presentations of materials. Consequently, teachers can introduce variations and extensions of basic materials, and more children engage in advanced work. While older children begin to speak in longer phrases and produce whole sentences, noticeable gaps and errors in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation still exist.

Rosanova concluded that the growth toward bilingualism in young children is robust in the right circumstances. The Montessori curriculum provides essential foundations, particularly for basic social language, while acknowledging challenges in developing Cognitive and Academic Language. The Montessori teacher, according to Rosanova, should identify typical issues of second language learners and conduct systematic, unobtrusive assessments for children to reflect on their language skill growth. This involves observing children as they perform tasks, engaging them in discussions about their learning, and encouraging self-assessment.

In her article, Wysmulek (2009) presented the possible applications of the Montessori Method and chosen principles in the realm of teaching foreign languages. Proposing that the incorporation of Montessori principles in language learning classes holds practical use, the author outlined several reasons supporting this assertion. Primarily, she advocated for the humanization

and individualization of the study process, stating that Montessori principles, such as the teacher's role as an observer and helper in preparing, working individually with each child, and fostering respect and freedom in discipline, can be effectively realized in foreign language classes (p. 452). Furthermore, she argued that a Montessori class provided the child with the freedom to learn the language at their own pace and in alignment with their unique abilities. Recognizing the diversity in children's learning needs, the author emphasized the importance of guiding each child individually through their distinct learning path. Additionally, she provided a Montessori lesson as an example, suggesting that innovative technologies such as Project Making, the Portfolio Method, Role Play, Circle Check, and others could easily be integrated into learning, departing from traditionally organized lessons (p. 452).

Moreover, Wysmulek drew parallels between the organizational aspects of Montessori lessons and modern approaches to teaching the English language. She noted the similarity in class organization, homework assignments, and checking classwork, underscoring the adaptability of Montessori principles to contemporary teaching methodologies (pp. 452–453). In conclusion, the author maintained that the global dissemination of the Montessori Method proves its promising nature. She speculated that the method holds potential for application in various educational settings and can contribute to resolving certain educational challenges.

In their paper, *English Teaching Features on the basis of the Montessori System Among Preschool Age Children* (2016), Akhsanova and Salyakhova shared insights from their professional experience at a Montessori preschool in Russia, where they employed the Montessori Method to enhance the subject-spatial environment for foreign language learning. The development encompassed key areas such as speech development, reading and writing, sensory education, and zones dedicated to travel and geography, all taught in English. Within the article, the authors not only describe their Montessori-inspired activities for reading, writing, speaking, listening, sound exploration, vocabulary acquisition, and geography studies but also offer practical suggestions for implementation.

One of the activities highlighted is the preparation for reading and writing, utilizing frame-inserts, a game material integral to Montessori's methodology. The task involves encircling figures within frames, colouring them with pencils, and memorizing English associations of concepts, such as "blue, pink, a square, a star". The children engage in constructing syntagms or phrases (e.g. "It's a little red oval; I like this black square; a yellow house, a big star"), fostering sensory skills, visual and tactile recognition of different forms, optical-spatial thinking, shape and colour recognition, observation, attention, eye coordination, fine motor skills, and hand movement coordination.

From their observations, the authors concluded that integrating the Montessori Method significantly enhances English language mastery among preschool children. It not only contributes to their personal development but also elevates motivation for learning, satisfies educational interests, cultivates communication skills, broadens worldviews, and positively influences readiness for school (p. 763). Additionally, they emphasized the continuous evolution of Montessori's pedagogy, underscored by teaching and learning techniques tested over years of practice. They concluded that Montessori's pedagogy is constantly evolving with teaching and learning techniques which were tested over years of practice. These techniques require creative teacher's approach; the integration of the system of training concerning rhythmic, musical and regional geographic components; graphic activity; theatre arts; and creative tasks in the system of education. These components ensure that preschool children reach a high level of foreign language mastery.

Finally, Winnefeld (2012) stated that "bilingual education seems to be feasible and applicable in Montessori education" however, "even in a bilingual classroom the Montessori way of learning may not allow for very much oral production of the foreign language" (p. 69). The author stated that L2 production and interaction, which use communication strategies such as the negotiation of meaning and modified output, have a positive influence on L2 learning and support its development. The author suggested Task-based Language Learning (TBLL) as one way to promote oral language production and the use of communication strategies such as the negotiation of meaning. Therefore, the author argued that TBLL is a promising approach for facilitating of L2 production and thus the development of speaking skills in a Montessori context. Additionally, the author hypothesized that TBLL could be implemented in a bilingual Montessori environment while still making the Montessori Method of learning possible. The author introduced TBLL as "a means of enabling individual foreign language learning in a Montessori environment so that the development of speaking skills is facilitated as well" (p. 70). In addition to discussing their effects on learners' interaction and performance during task-based interaction, examples of task design were presented. Finally, the author concluded that the lack of opportunities for children to produce a foreign language in some Montessori schools can be resolved by implementing TBLL techniques to create such opportunities for oral interaction and L2 production. Additionally, the author stated that, considering previous research findings on the effects of task design and implementation variables, the implementation of TBLL in a Montessori elementary classroom appears to be beneficial. Furthermore, the author stated that TBLL could be applied during the first work cycle, which is referred to as 'free work'. The TBLL tasks would not interrupt the 'free work' period, "since the variety of tasks can become part of the prepared environment and task-based work can happen on the basis of interest, individual choice, and autoeducation, i.e., the Montessori way of learning" (p. 79).

DISCUSSION

The overview of the research presented in this paper offers insights into Montessori-based language learning, emphasizing its strengths and areas that call for further exploration. This discussion places the research findings within the principles of Montessori pedagogy and the contemporary view of foreign language learning.

The research findings across the presented studies emphasized the importance of the *prepared environment* aspect within the Montessori pedagogy for teaching English as a foreign language. For example, Handayani's (2014) observations affirmed the effectiveness of Montessori materials in providing a conducive and spontaneous environment for language learning. Jendza's (2016) action research highlighted the necessity for creative inspiration and enrichment in teaching, indicating that the Montessori Method is not a rigid application but rather a framework open to innovative adaptation. Creating an environment where young English language learners can choose activities tailored to their interests, according to Adisti's (2018) study, made a positive impact of applying Montessori values and therefore fostering increased enthusiasm for learning. Aktaş's (2017) research, which was conducted in a socially just environment using the Montessori Method for EAL also emphasized the importance of a prepared setting in achieving accurate language learning outcomes. Additionally, Rosanova's (1997) exploration of language immersion at the Intercultural Montessori School reinforces the role of a language-rich environment in promoting bilingualism.

Collectively, these findings emphasize the important role of a carefully prepared environment in the success of Montessori language education, aligning with contemporary principles that encourage learner-centered, adaptive, and technology-integrated learning spaces. The Montessori Method aligns with contemporary principles of early foreign language learning in the holistic approach to the child while ensuring a conducive and enticing learning environment where language is learned through various situations, with various materials, and through activities which are meaningful, familiar to children from their mother tongues such as games, songs, stories (European Commission, 2011). They necessitate providing meaningful contexts and relevant thematic areas along with the visual approach, multisensory learning which is age-related and taking full advantage of the children's physical predispositions. Research findings by Silić (2007) indicated a positive correlation between increased exposure to a foreign language and enhanced language learning effectiveness. Therefore, content and methodology should be selected to ensure that the children retain and deepen their natural openness to what is new, and over the course of the learning process acquire sensitivity in self-perception and the perception of others (Edelenbos et al., 2006).

The second principle of Montessori pedagogy, *the principle of educated teachers*, emerged as a key factor influencing the success of teaching English as a foreign language, as indicated by the research findings. The central role of the Montessori teacher in fostering self-growth, problem-solving skills, and social responsibility among students became evident (Ghaffari, Kashkouli & Sadighi, 2017) as did the need for a highly creative approach from teachers when applying Montessori values to maintain engagement and prevent student boredom (Adisti, 2018). Observations by Handayani (2014) further emphasized the role of teachers in applying Montessori techniques, allowing children to be spontaneous and express themselves freely within a language learning context. The creative teacher's approach in the implementation of Montessori activities for reading, writing, speaking, listening and vocabulary learning was highlighted by Akhsanova and Salyakhova (2016). Winnefeld (2012) advocated TBLL as a means to facilitate L2 production, emphasizing the importance of a knowledgeable and adaptable teacher. This is closely associated with Montessori language teaching which can be defined as an approach based on full immersion in a language environment with self-corrective activities, fostering autonomy and problem-solving learning by developing the critical ability towards a foreign language. Overall, the critical role of an educated teacher in implementing the Montessori approach for effective language education prevails in the research. With respect to teachers' competences, we cite Rosanova "If the teacher's words cannot always be understood, then it is absolutely critical that the environment speaks" (1997, p. 12). Furthermore, the author noted that the level of competence and commitment to Montessori principles needs to be higher than what one might expect in a monolingual Montessori program (Rosanova, 1997, pp. 13–14). Language learning is not presented as a school subject, rather as a communicative tool that is integrated with all other subjects and routines. In that respect, it differs from language teaching within conventional school settings where teacher expertise and patterns of provision present challenges, i.e., understandings about what may be achieved with limited intensity of provision (2–3 lessons per week) are often confused.

The contemporary principles of educated teachers place emphasis on teacher professionalism, pre-service teacher training, continuing professional development and extended education, creativity, and adaptability. In planning and implementing the aims, content and methods of early foreign language learning, the practitioner or teacher should always ensure that the child's needs are considered. Furthermore, the demand for well-qualified teachers with English competency has proven challenging in many contexts (Enever, 2016, p. 361). This is mostly due to the limited availability of appropriate teacher preparation courses at both pre-service and in-service levels.

Furthermore, Handayani (2014) reported that the Montessori Method allows children to be spontaneous and express themselves freely, fostering

an environment conducive to language learning. This aligns with the Montessori principle of *child freedom*, which was consistently emphasised in the research findings. Adisti (2018) explored the positive impact of this principle, demonstrating that students enjoy learning more and exhibit greater responsibility when given freedom to choose activities. This freedom also extends to language expression. For example, Winnefeld (2012) suggested the effectiveness of TBLL within a Montessori context, promoting oral language production. Finally, Aktaş (2017) examined the Montessori Method for EAL and emphasized the importance of student voice within the framework, aligning with the principle of granting children the freedom to shape their educational path.

Overall, these studies reveal the crucial role of providing children with freedom and autonomy within a structured framework, ultimately contributing to effective language learning.

Contemporary principles of language learning also emphasize learner agency, autonomy, and self-directed learning. Autonomy, as the “capacity to take control of one’s own learning” (Benson, 2001, p. 47), can take place in the day-to-day management of learning, the cognitive processes involved in language acquisition, and decisions about learning content (Benson, 2016, p. 339).

According to the revised Nuremberg Recommendations for early foreign language learning (Goethe Institut, 1993), early foreign language programs should provide as many practical opportunities as possible, specifically tailored to the age-groups concerned, for children to experience and appreciate children’s rights, and thus for the individual child’s sense of self to be strengthened. This includes listening to children, inviting them to express themselves, permitting questions, and exercising sensitivity and discretion in the correction of errors.

CONCLUSION

This research review explored the potential of the Montessori Method for teaching English as a foreign, second, or additional language to young learners. The analysis of the nine studies aimed to reveal how the core principles of Montessori pedagogy align with contemporary views on effective language learning.

The analysis revealed several strengths of the Montessori Method in promoting effective English language learning. First, the emphasis on the prepared environment, characterized by child-sized furniture, a variety of teaching materials, and hands-on learning experiences, fostered a sense of enjoyment, encouraged exploration, and promoted experimentation with materials. This aligns with contemporary trends towards learner-centered environments equipped with diverse materials and technology to facilitate multisensory language acquisition.

Second, the analysed research papers highlighted the key role of the Montessori teacher, whose characteristics reflect many qualities of contemporary foreign language teachers. Montessori teachers guided their students toward autonomy, problem-solving skills, and social responsibility. Their expertise and commitment were essential for creating engaging and dynamic language learning experiences. Like Montessori teachers, foreign language teachers are also expected to develop students' independence, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. This is achieved by creating interactive, learner-centered lessons, where students are actively involved in the learning process.

Third, the importance of offering children freedom within a structured framework was evident in the research presented. Allowing students to choose activities, express themselves, and contribute to their own learning fostered enthusiasm, independence, and a sense of ownership. This aligns with contemporary principles that promote learner agency and self-directed learning as important aspects of effective language education.

Although the analysis of the research papers reveals strengths of the Montessori Method such as encouraging children's engagement and creating positive learning environments, it has also identified some challenges. The absence of formal examinations made it difficult to measure student achievements, and the method demanded a high level of creativity from teachers to maintain an engaging learning experience. Despite these limitations, the research suggested that the Montessori Method holds promise for teaching EFL/ESL/EAL to young learners. With adjustments in activities, materials, and organizational structures due to differing age groups, learning objectives and achievement measurements, the method is applicable to both pre-school and elementary education

Finally, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of this research. First, the studies reviewed were conducted in diverse contexts, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the generalizability of the findings. Second, the research focused primarily on qualitative data, limiting the ability to measure the long-term effectiveness of the Montessori approach for language acquisition. Therefore, more research is needed regarding long-term language proficiency, assessment practices, and teacher training to better understand methods' effectiveness in diverse settings and guide their application in language education.

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PRIMJENA MONTESSORI NAČELA U NASTAVI ENGLSKOGA KAO STRANOGA JEZIKA: PREGLED ISTRAŽIVANJA

Sažetak: Ovaj rad istražuje primjenu obrazovne filozofije Marije Montessori, Montessori metode, u poučavanju stranih jezika. Ova metoda, koja potječe iz ranih godina 20. stoljeća, prioritet daje praktičnim iskustvima, aktivnom učenju i slobodi u nastavi. Unatoč uspjehu Montessori metode u općem obrazovanju, njezina prilagodba učenju stranih jezika nije standardizirana po pitanju materijala ili smjernica. Upravo taj nedostatak definiranog okvira za poučavanje jezika u Montessori školama potiče na istraživanja o uspješnosti metode. Stoga rad daje pregled Montessori pedagogije s naglaskom na poučavanju jezika, analizirajući postojeća istraživanja o uključivanju Montessori načela u poučavanje engleskoga jezika. Cilj je izložiti učinkovitost ove metode u poučavanju jezika uzimajući u obzir njezine prednosti i izazove te zagovarajući daljnja istraživanja radi poboljšanja njezine primjene. Istraživanje Montessori načela u poučavanju jezika pridonosi saznanjima o raznolikosti pristupa učenju i poučavanju jezika.

Ključne riječi: alternativni pristup, metode poučavanja jezika, obrazovna filozofija