

Study finds that children can learn a second language in preschool

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Interim results from an international research project which looks at bilingual education reveal that children can learn a second language as early as preschool.

The University of Hertfordshire is one of nine European partners in ELIAS (Early Language and Intercultural Acquisition Studies) which was awarded €300,000 by the European Union last year to research bilingual education and intercultural awareness in [children](#) through observational studies and language assessments in six project preschools.

The researchers use a concept called ‘immersion teaching’, whereby children are addressed in each language by the respective native speaker and asked to respond in that language.

The study focuses on bilingual preschools in Germany, Sweden and Belgium, where the staff members are teachers from the respective country, but at least one teacher is a native speaker of English. Data is also collected from nurseries in Hertfordshire and the bilingual nursery of the German school in London. Children’s progress in English is measured through a receptive vocabulary test and a grammar task that was designed within the project. So far, 266 preschool children aged between three and five took part in the tests.

The researchers found that although not all the preschool groups performed equally well in the tests, and there was a large amount of individual variation in children’s comprehension of vocabulary and

grammatical phenomena, there was clear evidence that it is feasible for children to start to learn a [second language](#) in a [preschool](#) context, using immersion methods.

Dr Christina Schelletter, a senior lecturer in English Language and Communication in the School of Humanities at the University of Hertfordshire, who leads the UK investigation said: “We have found that immersion-type teaching can be of real benefit to children. Immersion is the best and most successful method of foreign language learning at an early age. The natural learning abilities of young children as well as their enthusiasm promise rapid and successful acquisition of the [second language](#).”

Provided by University of Hertfordshire ([news](#) : [web](#))

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