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Early foreign language learning in a Montessori context: Fostering enthusiasm, language awareness and language learning through linguistic landscape tasks

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ABSTRACT

Unlike many traditional pedagogical approaches, Montessori pedagogy is characterized by curiosity-driven learning in a prepared environment which encourages independent and hands-on learning practices. Linguistic Landscape (LL) tasks could be expected to fit in well with this approach as they offer young language learners the opportunity to interact with diverse aspects of the English language in a creative and critical manner, which has the potential to foster language awareness and independent language learning. The project discussed in this paper was carried out at a Montessori school in a rural region of Austria. 16 learners (ages 6-9 years) took part in an intensive LL workshop followed by semi-structured interviews. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Thematic Analysis. The interviews show that the young learners are enthusiastic about learning from the LL. They are aware of the role and functions of English, especially its use as a global lingua franca. This language awareness seems to be amplified and strengthened by the workshop and interviews. Learners also demonstrate curiosity about specific linguistic aspects of English, such as pronunciation and word formation. The results indicate that LL tasks might strengthen several key aspects of developing language awareness among young learners, for example multilingualism, emerging sociolinguistic reflection and metalinguistic awareness. In addition, the study observed high levels of student engagement during these tasks, driven by curiosity and a desire to explore language beyond the classroom.

Keywords
linguistic landscape, Montessori pedagogy, young learners, language awareness

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Introduction

There has not been much research into English Language Teaching (ELT) in Montessori education to date. Therefore, for teachers who teach English as a foreign language in Montessori contexts, there is no specific approach, accepted best practice or standardized set of materials to fall back on. There are also no training courses or certifications that focus exclusively on teaching Modern Foreign Languages (MFLs) within a Montessori pedagogical framework. Consequently, the responsibility for implementing foreign language instruction in Montessori schools is largely the responsibility of individual teachers (Winnefeld, 2012).

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It is therefore not surprising that individual teachers and school communities have developed their own practical approaches to teaching languages in different regions of the world. These range from narrow approaches, such as occasional 'language showers' (a period during the school day when teachers use a foreign language during pupils' everyday activities) and circle time sessions in the foreign language, to broader strategies such as dual models of instruction, various types of 'language corners' in classrooms, immersion, and team teaching with the inclusion of a language specialist in the Montessori classroom.

Likewise, materials, resources, and approaches to foreign language learning come in different shapes and forms (for example as add-ons to traditional Montessori classrooms or as a transitional or integral part of the learning environment). All of these models of language instruction aim to foster linguistically diverse environments (Rosales Chavarría, 2019), and some of them overlap or share common features (Consalvo & Tomazzolli, 2019) as they all seek to apply specific principles of Montessori pedagogy which are deemed pertinent to language instruction by Montessori educators.

In this paper, we approach Montessori pedagogy from an ELT angle and explore possible synergies between Linguistic Landscape (LL) work, a current approach in ELT, and central principles of Montessori pedagogy.

Literature review

Montessori pedagogy and ELT

Essentially, Montessori pedagogy could be said to provide a project-based learning and inquiry setting (Livstrom et al., 2019) which offers a stimulating learning environment where children can develop their abilities without barriers, a condition that contributes to achieving higher goals (Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2021). Additionally, the environment is always adapted to the child's age, providing an appropriate level of stimulation that is neither too little nor too overwhelming. This enables the child to select their own learning activities. Maria Montessori emphasized nurturing children's passion for learning (Murray, 2011). "Our aim therefore is not merely to make the child understand . . . but to so touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his inmost core. We do not want complacent pupils, but eager ones" (Montessori, 1989, p. 11).

These ideas might be hard to reconcile with a traditional textbook-based approach to ELT that prioritizes theoretical explanations of grammar and memorization of vocabulary, but the field of ELT has largely moved on from such practices. These days, the dominant methodology is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). While CLT is not a clearly defined method (Harmer, 2015), most language teachers would probably agree on a number of guiding principles (see, for example, Richards, 2006), most importantly an understanding that learners learn language through meaningful communication rather than rote memorization, and that meaning is more important in the language learning process than linguistic accuracy. The teacher's role in this process is to "give students opportunities to engage in purposeful interpretation and expression of meaning" (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022, p.12). This seems to be in line with some of the core principles of Montessori pedagogy mentioned in Marshall (2017), namely, a focus on special materials in combination with learners' self-directed engagement with those materials.

ELT and global uses of English

In recent years, ELT has become the subject of criticism for failing to take into account the changing role of English in the world. Over the last few decades, English has become the most important global language which many people use extensively in their everyday lives, as Galloway (2017) explains:

> It is used as a second, or official, language in many countries and as an official, or de-facto, working language in many international organizations. English is the main language for scientific exchange and has become the main language of academia, international business, political exchange and international diplomacy. It dominates popular culture and international scholarship […]. (p. 2)

In many countries around the world, it may therefore no longer be appropriate to think of English as a 'foreign' language which learners study so that they can speak to native speakers of that language once they are proficient enough. Rather, English has become a language that many people use every day to communicate with speakers of many different first languages.

This means that both the needs of learners and the goals of English language teaching have changed (Galloway & Rose, 2018). This recent development is not yet reflected in the materials that are available to most teachers around the world, much less in standardized language exams. It has been said that this has led to a situation where teachers often simply continue to do what they have been doing despite all the changes in the way English is used today (Matsuda, 2012).

This situation is, of course, not unique to language teaching. In traditional schools, teachers and textbooks frequently overlook the importance of using meaningful contexts when introducing new information (Bransford et al., 1999). Such contexts are crucial for learners, however, because they link new knowledge to existing knowledge, clarify its relevance, or simply make the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable. Without these meaningful contexts, children may struggle to effectively integrate new information, may lack the motivation to learn, and may also expend more cognitive resources on processing, leaving fewer resources available for other aspects of learning (Lillard, 2017).

Against this backdrop, it is clear that the field of ELT needs to adapt to the changing role of English in the world. One way of doing so might be the use of English in the learners' everyday environment outside the classroom for English language teaching. This was the approach taken in the project which is discussed in this paper.

Linguistic Landscape (LL) and ELT

The project presented in this paper was carried out in Austria, where English plays an important and growing role in people's lives. In education, English is the first foreign language they study at school for 99% of learners in Austria (Nagel et al., 2012), beginning in their first year of primary school, if not before. Young people are expected to reach the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) level B2 by the time they take their secondary school leaving exam. Programs that use English as the language of instruction are also very popular in primary and secondary schools, and due to the internationalization of higher education, English is frequently used as a medium of instruction at colleges and universities.

In Austrian society, English has no official status, while the role of German as the official language of the state is enshrined in the constitution and linguistic rights are granted to some minorities (e.g., the Slovene minority in the southern province of Carinthia). However,

like in many other countries, the presence of English is literally visible in the physical environment as English is featured on many notices, billboards and posters, particularly in urban areas. This "(potential) visibility [is] captured in the term 'linguistic landscape'" (Roos & Nicholas, 2019, p. 91).

While studies on the linguistic landscape of Austria tend to focus on the capital city, Vienna, researchers have also highlighted the high profile of English in the linguistic landscape of Graz, the second largest city in the country (approx. 303,000 inhabitants) and the provincial capital of the south-eastern province of Styria, where our study was carried out. Compared to the low visibility of the languages of neighboring countries, e.g., Slovenia, whose border is only about 50 km from Graz, and nearby Hungary, the strong presence of English in the linguistic landscape of the city is particularly notable. Researchers have cited the international role of English as the likeliest explanation (Schrammel-Leber & Lorenz, 2013). This is in line with a "recurrent finding of many [LL] studies on expanding circle countries […] that English takes 'second place' in the language hierarchy, after the official state language" (Gorter & Cenoz, 2024, p. 293).

Given the presence of English in public spaces and its dominance in education, it seems obvious that LL activities should be used with learners of English. LLs have the potential to provide "authentic, contextualized input" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008, p. 274) for learners and thus shift the focus of ELT "from providing input to helping students learn from the input in the world around them" (Fürstenberg & Egger, 2022, p.136). LL tasks have been said to offer "a comprehensive and nuanced approach grounded in real-world experiences and cultural understanding" by immersing learners in the linguistic environment surrounding them, thus providing "additional target language input while fostering language awareness, multiliteracy, and critical thinking skills." (Khan, 2023, p. 1081).

There has been considerable interest in the pedagogical potential of LL in recent years. This development has even been described as an "educational turn" (Krompák et al., 2022, as cited in Melo-Pfeifer, 2023) in LL studies. In ELT, this 'turn' is reflected in projects such as *LLinELT* (Solmaz & Przymus, 2021) and *LoCALL* (Brinkman et al. 2022; Melo-Pfeifer, 2023). More recently, researchers have focused on LL materials design (Przymus & Solmaz, 2025) and the role of the LL for developing multilingual awareness (Si, 2025).

Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in mainstream schools may well be aware of the potential benefits of LL tasks for their learners, but there are indications that they do not make a lot of use of LL tasks in their teaching. This may be because it is often difficult for them to find time for activities not directly demanded by the curriculum: "But pausing, taking time, deviating from plans – these terms do not describe our current education systems. Teachers in many cases may want to do all of these things, but the system hardly allows it, being geared towards efficiency, routine, speed and accountability" (Schinkel, 2020).

There may be less pressure on teachers to meet goals imposed on them and more freedom to experiment in Montessori schools, which is why we believe that LL tasks have the potential to be a good match for language learning within a Montessori framework. This was the motivation behind designing and implementing the LL project for a Montessori school described in this paper and investigating its effect on the learners in terms of their English language learning.

In doing so, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ 1: Is there evidence of learners' enthusiasm (in terms of agency, intrinsic motivation and curiosity) in the data?

RQ 2: Do the data suggest that the learners in the project make use of the LL as a context for self-directed learning (about) English?

Procedure

Workshop and data collection

The project was designed and carried out jointly by the authors of this paper, a teacher-researcher in ELT teacher education at the University of Graz and a teacher-researcher in English medium instruction who taught English at the private Montessori school which participated in the project.

The school is located in Upper Styria, a rural region of Austria. The school generally emphasizes both science and EFL in its curriculum, and the children are organized into multi-age classrooms (Primaria I ranging from the 1st to the 3rd grade, i.e., ages 6-8; Primaria II ranging from grade 4 to grade 6, i.e., ages 9-11 and Sekundaria I, ranging from the 4th grade to the 6th, i.e., ages 12-15). 16 pupils from Primaria I and II took part in the project (see appendix for a list of participants) with full approval from the institution and their parents' consent.

The project consisted of three phases:

1. exploring the LL in the city center of Graz
2. reflecting on English in the LL of the city center
3. semi-structured interviews with the participants.

In the **first phase**, the learners acted as "language detectives" (Sayer, 2010, p. 152), looking for examples of English in the LL of Graz. They visited the city for the day with their teachers to take part in the project. In the city center of Graz, they were assigned to two mixed-level groups of eight students each, and each group was accompanied by two adults. They were given an age-appropriate worksheet (a list of the letters of the alphabet) and told to "collect examples of English" (at least one example per letter) and write down the words they spotted on signs, billboards etc.. The older children were told to help the younger children who could not write yet. Instructions were given in German, the children's shared language. The children spent 45 minutes exploring the main square and the surrounding streets, taking notes on their worksheets, while the adults took photographs of the English words that they observed the children copying.

The **second phase** took place in a university seminar room. In a session led by the two teacher-researchers, the children were asked to comment on the examples of English they had collected with the help of the photographs the adults had taken, which had been printed out in the meantime. This allowed the children to reflect on their findings and deepen their understanding of the presence of English in their environment.

In both phases, the enthusiasm of the children was palpable. The adults all noted that they had no trouble staying on task in phase one, and in phase two, they spontaneously added English words to their collection by reading slogans on their t-shirts or water-bottles.

The **third phase** of the project consisted of semi-structured interviews with the same number of learners five days later. These interviews (see appendix for interview protocol) were conducted at the children's school by the teacher-researcher who was also the children's English teacher. As the children were primarily L1 speakers of German, the interviews were mainly carried out in German, with the exception of one interview which was carried out in English at the request of the learner. The interviews (length approximately 20-25 minutes each) were recorded. Informed consent was obtained from the parents of the children for the recordings to be transcribed and used for research and publication.

Data analysis

The combination of an interactive workshop and in-depth interviews with the children ensured a comprehensive exploration of the children's linguistic experiences for the teacher-researchers. A thematic analysis of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017) then provided a structured framework for interpreting the data.

The recorded interviews were first transcribed using the *aTrain* software program. The raw transcripts were then proofread and corrected by the teacher-researchers. The children were given pseudonyms in the transcripts and the interviews were translated into English. These steps helped the teacher-researchers to familiarize themselves with the data in preparation for conducting a thematic analysis.

The teacher-researchers coded the data independently at first using MaxQDA. After intercoder reliability checks, they compared and discussed their initial codings to resolve differences and establish a common list of codes. This list formed the basis of a second wave of coding which was carried out jointly. As a next step, codes were grouped thematically. The two main thematic strands were 'Montessori' and 'Language Awareness', with three sub-strands each which were subdivided further (see code map in the appendix).

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings of the interview study will be presented and discussed. In the first part, the focus will be on evidence of learners' enthusiasm in the data (RQ1). The idea of 'enthusiasm' is broken down into the components of motivation, agency, enjoyment and curiosity. The second part focuses on indications in the data that the learners were able to learn from English in the LL, both in terms of their general language awareness and in terms of specific features of the English language (RQ2). For each quote from an interview, the interviewee's pseudonym and a line number in the interview corpus are provided in brackets following the quote (for example, 201 June refers to a quote from June's interview and line number 201 in the corpus).

Evidence of enthusiasm

Research in the area of language learning and language learner psychology (see for example Murayama et al., 2013; Steinmayr & Spinath, 2009) shows that students' language learning behaviors are influenced by affective-motivational factors which encompass emotions tied to specific situations or interests, as well as emotions related to tasks or subjects. In fact, these

factors can be reflected in how much value a student places on a subject or task, the enjoyment they feel while doing it, or their intrinsic motivation to participate in the activity or situation. The enthusiastic learners that are at the heart of the Montessori approach to education would definitely show that they value the tasks they actively engage in and enjoy them, and this enthusiasm is also mirrored in the data.

The learners frequently mentioned how much they enjoyed the LL task: "Totally cool, it was totally cool" (2, Sven), "great fun" (13, Carla) and even relaxing: "I enjoyed walking down the street like this - and looking for English words. It was very relaxed." (415, Lio)." Previous research on language learning psychology indicates that enjoyment plays a role in fostering students' intrinsic motivation (cf. Ryan & Deci, 2000), which is also a key predictor of students' sustained effort and persistence in learning. While performing the LL task, one participant explained how his sense of enjoyment made him engage more deeply with the task, from simply wandering through the streets to actively trying to remember new words: "So I'm not stressed or anything like that - I can simply wander through the streets and write them [the English words] down. At the same time I listen to the pronunciation and then I remember better" (443, Lio). Another pupil concluded: "Yes, I think it's a good method for learning English" (439, Lio).

Another interesting theme that was present in the data was agency. In language learner psychology, agency refers to "the ways in which, and the extent to which, a person is compelled to, motivated to, allowed to, and coerced to, act" (Van Lier, 2010; p.x). When learners participate in setting meaningful personal objectives and actively work towards them, this demonstrates agency (Carson, 2012). However, this sense of agency diminishes when others dictate the goals or the methods to achieve them. This is reminiscent of the ideal of self-directed learning promoted by Montessori pedagogy.

Talking about language learning and the LL task, the learners frequently mentioned reasons that compel them personally to engage with English. In one interview the learner talks about his knowledge of English "and we already know so much English" (301, June) and another learner clearly explains this further: "But we also know English. And sometimes we speak it at home" (337, Eva). Another interesting remark was made by another learner who mentioned that she sees herself as "someone that comes from England because everybody says I come from England with my family because I can speak good English" [original quote from an interview conducted in English] (216, Lea). This agentic orientation was also seen in a comment made by a learner who reported sometimes speaking English although nobody told her to do it: "And I simply wanted to say hello in German. And then I said it in English. I don't know why, but it simply happened." (252, Lea). In addition, another learner reported on personal objectives when it comes to language learning: "Yes, because you see others who already speak English better - then, for example, you want to learn that, too. That's just the way it is. That you somehow want to be as good as the others." (376, June) The data also seem to indicate that the pupils are very well aware of their agentic orientation which also translates into personal language learning strategies:

> And then I always have to think of strategies. Then I have the feeling that I have to think of strategies on how I can express this differently, the things that I don't know yet. That's what this sometimes feels like for me. (509, Lio).

The data also revealed interesting insights into other cognitive elements which are essential for learning and engaging with a language. In this context, a prominent theme was curiosity. As stated above, Maria Montessori said that she didn't want "complacent pupils, but eager ones". It seems that curiosity is a particularly important driver of an eagerness to learn. Referring to the LL task, one learner (Lio) expressed his desire to learn something new, which was exciting for him: "It is kind of exciting because you learn something new"(396). He also felt that the workshop sparked his curiosity as he found it interesting to see what was written on the noticeboard and because of this he wanted to "know" what it says (505, Lio). Another pupil described how curiosity sparks a learning process for her:

> I'm going to a lake then. And then on the way I always search for things and I have always a paper with me and a pen. I always keep that with me. And then I'm seeing trees and I write down trees. And yeah, when I see something, like trees or grass, I write it on my paper. And then at the end, when we go with our bag and then we are by the arm, then I'm pronouncing the words and trying to remember it in German. And I'm writing it in German under the English word. (224, Lea) [original quote from an interview conducted in English]

Self-directed language learning in the LL

Montessori pedagogy generally provides a prepared learning environment for learners to engage with. In the LL workshop discussed in this paper, the LL served as an environment for self-directed learning of English as a foreign language. This is in line with Sayer's (2010) approach to using the LL for the purposes of language learning. He identifies two main goals for LL projects:

> First, it gets students to make connections between the content of classroom lessons and the world beyond the classroom walls. Second, it allows students to think creatively and analytically about how language is used in society and become more aware of their own sociolinguistic context. (Sayer, 2010)

Both of these goals, if realized, can contribute to building meaningful connections between English as a school subject and learners' own context and thus boost learners' general language awareness.

In addition, evaluating previous research, Roos & Nicholas (2019) list various benefits of LL tasks that focus more specifically on the forms and functions of language. These include the claim that LL tasks provide opportunities for language learners "to notice multiple features of a language, to engage creatively and critically with diverse aspects of the language being learned and to explore key aspects of the use of that language in context" (p. 94). Thus, a successful LL does not only make learners aware of the role of English in their lives, it also encourages them to pick up and think about specific features of the language. The analysis of the interviews indicates that the LL workshop prompted a lot of reflection on the functions and characteristics of English in the learners.

First of all, the learners noted in the interviews that there was a considerable amount of English to be found in the city center of Graz, for example: "The Main Square especially, we couldn't get away from there […] there were so many [English] words [for us to copy" (2, Carla). Another learner commented on the fact that they were in a bigger city compared to the town where their school is located: "It's a bigger city and you simply see more signs [in English] there" (410, Tim).

Concerning the functions of English, learners talked about the presence of English in connection with their experiences with English in their lives. It is notable that at such a young age, all the learners already seemed to be cognizant of the role of English as a global language that is spoken and understood all over the globe, rather than simply a language that is spoken as a first language in certain countries. Several learners made comments to that effect, for example: "English just is the world language. And so, most people and foreigners understand it" (27, Toby); "because almost the whole world speaks English" (23, Toby); "so you can talk to everybody [in English]" (89, Leni). One learner explicitly explained the lingua franca use of English, i.e., English as a medium of communication between two people who do not share the same first language: "Because when somebody speaks a language that we don't know, we can still both speak English" (93, Leni).

This makes English an important language to know, as Lio (501) pointed out in his interview:

> The other languages are important as well, but English is really the most important one, because if you are on holiday somewhere else, you can speak English – and then you don't have to [learn to] speak those other languages just for a holiday.

By contrast, German was seen by the same learner to be restricted to a comparatively small geographical area:

> With only German, for example, you don't get that far in the world. […] You can get by in Luxembourg, Germany and Liechtenstein – and half of Switzerland. That's a real pain if you want to travel further afield because you can't talk to the people there. So, it's good to speak several languages – or at least another one [in addition to German], such as English. (501, Lio)

The ability to communicate while traveling is also mentioned by another learner: "So, for example, when we're in Croatia, when we are there – we can also speak English there most of the time" (325, Eva).

It should be mentioned that the need to speak English to first language speakers of English was also acknowledged by the learners ("because there are also English people" [410, Tim], "for example for the English or for [people from] the USA" [487, Lio]), as well as a desire to learn other languages: "But it's cool if you speak other languages as well" (352, June). The code map shows, however, that this happened to a much lesser extent: 18 segments were coded for 'English as a global language', compared to 8 for 'L1 English' and 7 for 'other languages'.

When the learners spoke about reasons for learning English beyond travel, the majority of their comments also refer to the use of English as a lingua franca: "As a veterinarian especially, I have to speak English well" (97, Leni); "Because if somebody doesn't speak German, I have to speak English. For example, as a horse riding instructor" (101, Leni). Sometimes the learners go into some detail about the jobs that they imagine English is needed for:

> When you are a farmer you have to speak it [English] because if at some point you want to get a tractor or a trailer from abroad. And also if somebody comes to you to see if they need a cow or not. (109, Toby)

> Sometimes [you] also [need to be able to speak good English] for certain jobs, at the airport, for example. At the airport, those people who sit in the tower [i.e., air traffic control], they have to speak English, otherwise the planes would get confused. (475, Lio)

As for features of English, several learners were able to recall some specific words they had noticed or learned five days after the workshop, when the interviews were conducted, for example: "we often found 'new'" (2, Carla), "up and down" (7, Toby). They also shared some observations on specific features of English that they had noticed. In addition to some general comments on the English language ("English is louder" [410, Tim], "And some things are difficult to pronounce" [386, Eva]), the learners also compared English to German. For instance, one learner commented on the perceived similarities between German and English: "Well, I think that most words in English are somehow the same as in German. For example, 'Musik' becomes 'music' and 'Name' is 'name'" (317, Eva). Another learner gave examples for both similarities and differences between the languages: "Some words are similar […] some words are completely different. For example, 'cat', that's similar. […] But 'dog' and 'Hund', that's the opposite, that's not so similar. […]. Or 'fly', that's similar again" (410, Colin).

Conclusion

Our data seem to indicate that the pupils have great enthusiasm for learning English in general. Their learning shows an agentic orientation in that they demonstrate intrinsic motivation to learn English and take ownership of their learning, for instance, by applying their own language learning strategies. It appears from the interview data that the LL workshop amplified and strengthened the learners' enthusiasm.

It is, of course, important to consider alternative explanations for the learners' enthusiasm beyond the task's pedagogical strengths. Some other factors that may have contributed, such as the excursion, peer interaction, and learning through exploration, could be seen as 'new' and therefore exciting to the learners in mainstream school settings. By contrast, these elements are fundamental within Montessori pedagogy and form part of pupils' everyday learning experience. What might be considered a special setting elsewhere is, in Montessori education, a normal and intentional part of how learning is structured.

There are indications that the workshop also expanded learners' existing awareness that English is a world language. To a lesser extent, they also reported learning new words. In the interviews, the learners made comments that seem to indicate that the workshop made them think about certain language features such as English-German loanwords and cognates or the spelling and pronunciation of English. It seems that the children were able to link their observations in the workshop to their prior experiences with English, as well as expand on them creatively, for example, when discussing the need for English in potential future jobs. Thus, it could be said that the LL served as a learning environment that allowed the pupils to expand their language awareness, particularly regarding the global role and functions of English, and also contributed to their language learning (e.g., new words).

Thus, it appears that the research reported on in this paper has the potential to be a promising addition to LL studies in ELT by demonstrating how LL tasks can foster language awareness and learner agency among young learners. It should be said, however, that although the core principles of LL-based language learning are applicable in various educational settings, the Montessori framework has distinctive features that may amplify the effectiveness of LL tasks. These are a prepared environment that encourages self-directed exploration, a facilitator role for the teacher, and the integration of cross-curricular projects. In a non-Montessori

primary school, therefore, outcomes may differ due to the greater emphasis placed on teacher-led instruction.

Limitations

A small-scale project such as the one presented in this paper necessarily has limitations. It has to be mentioned that in addition to being very small-scale, our study also focused on young learners from fairly privileged backgrounds. This is evident, for example, in their many references to international travel. Pupils without these experiences might have reacted differently to the LL task. Future research should aim to include learners from more diverse backgrounds.

It should also be noted that while the current study suggests that the LL tasks had a positive impact on learners' language awareness and motivation, particularly in fostering an agentic orientation and enthusiasm for English, no formal long-term follow-up was conducted to assess whether these effects were sustained over time. Hence, future research could benefit from longitudinal data collection to evaluate the durability of language awareness and motivation sparked by the workshop.

In terms of data collection and analysis, it is relevant to mention that one researcher was also the children's teacher, which may have influenced participants' interview responses and the interpretation of data. To mitigate the effects of this possible bias, the data were first coded independently by the researcher who had no prior connection to the children before the data were analyzed jointly by the researchers.

For all their limitations, however, small-scale studies such as the one presented in this paper might have benefits for practitioners, as Marshall (2017) explains:

> Montessori teachers often feel fear or uncertainty about being able to apply Montessori's theories in new and innovative ways while still adhering to her underlying philosophical principles. Ultimately, only empirical research, undertaken by teachers and researchers working together, can be our guide. (p. 11)

This, in turn, might prove fruitful for mainstream ELT, which is a very dynamic field which frequently borrows insights from related fields: "[O]ur understanding of language teaching has changed considerably over the last few decades, and will most likely continue to evolve as new insights into language teaching and learning become available to teachers." (Fürstenberg & Schumm Fauster, 2023, p.17) In the area of English language teaching, small-scale studies such as ours might therefore provide valuable impulses for innovation in ELT.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Participants Phases 1 to Phases 3

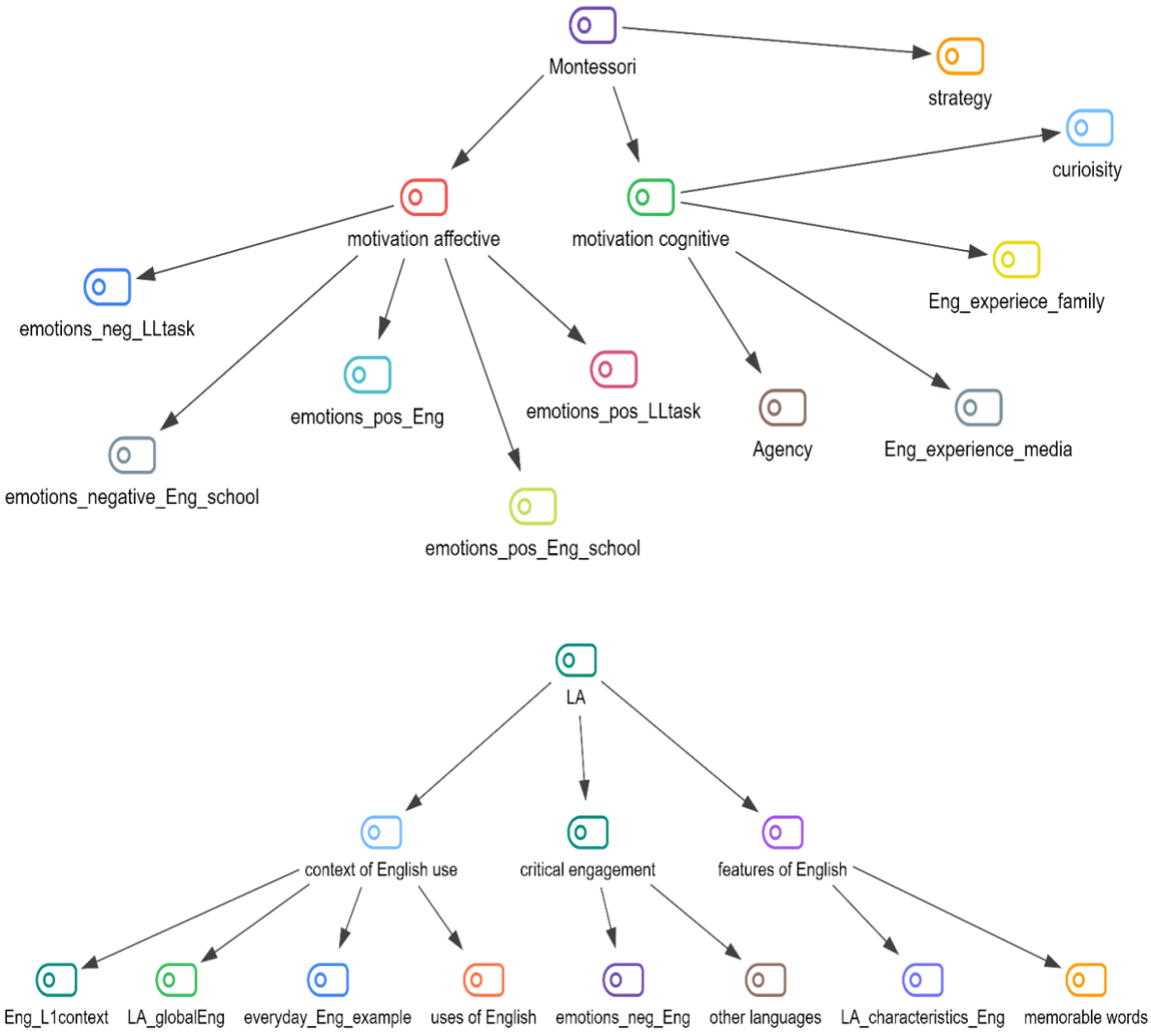
	Study Participants (pseudonyms)	**Group**	**First language**
1	Ben	Primaria 1	German
2	Leni	Primaria 1	German
3	Jan	Primaria 1	German
4	April	Primaria 1	German
5	Lea	Primaria 2	German
6	June	Primaria 2	German
7	Toby	Primaria 2	German
8	Louis	Primaria 2	German
9	Lio	Primaria 2	German
10	Sven	Primaria 2	German
11	Carla	Primaria 1	German
12	Eva	Primaria 2	German
13	Tim	Primaria 2	Bilingual (German/ English)
14	Marc	Primaria 1	German
15	Tom	Primaria 2	German
16	Colin	Primaria 2	German

Appendix 2: Interview protocol

1. Tell me about your experience with the linguistic landscape tasks (looking for English signs, symbols, and words in Graz)?
2. Did you enjoy the tasks, or did you find them challenging? Why?
3. Do you feel more confident using English now, compared to before you completed these tasks?
4. Do you see yourself differently when you speak English?
5. Are there moments when you felt proud of your language abilities? What are those moments?
6. What do you think you will need English for in the future?
7. What languages do you notice in your surroundings when you walk around in your neighborhood or school?

8. Are there any languages that you like / you would like to learn / that make you feel a sense of belonging or interest? Why?
9. Do you use English in your personal environment? How? For what purpose?
10. Do you think being able to speak multiple languages is important? Why or why not?
11. Have you ever felt that speaking a particular language changed the way you see yourself?
12. Have these tasks made you more interested in learning new languages? Why or why not?

Appendix 3: Code map



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