

The illusion of inclusion? Evaluating inclusive primary English as a foreign language education in an innovative special educational needs school

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Dieser Beitrag fasst die Ergebnisse der I-TEPS-Studie (Inclusive Teaching of EFL in Primary Schools) zusammen, einer Evaluationsstudie zum frühbeginnenden Englischunterricht in der Grundschule in einer innovativen inklusiven Schule in Deutschland. Die Studie wurde an einer Förderschule durchgeführt, die "Inklusion einmal anders" (Gebhard & Schröter 2017: 116) implementiert, indem sie in ihrem inklusiven Grundschulzweig Kinder ohne sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarf beschult. Aufgrund bislang weitestgehend fehlender Befunde zum inklusiven Englischunterricht widmet sich die Studie der folgenden Forschungsfrage: Zeigen Kinder ohne sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarf, die den Grundschulzweig einer innovativen inklusiven Förderschule besucht haben, am Ende von Klasse 4 (10 Jahre alt) vergleichbare rezeptive Englischfertigkeiten wie Kinder, die eine Regelgrundschule besucht haben? In der Querschnittstudie mit Kontrollgruppendesign wurden die rezeptiven Englischfertigkeiten von Grundschulkindern ohne sonderpädagogischen Förderbedarf sowohl an der Projektschule (n = 12) als auch an weiteren Regelgrundschulen (n = 306) getestet. Die Befunde zeigen, dass die Kinder aus der quasi-experimentellen Gruppe im Englischen vergleichbare Hörverstehensleistungen, jedoch schlechtere Leistungen im Leseverstehen aufweisen.

1. Introduction

"The illusion of inclusion. Once again, schools find themselves in the middle of an ideological war. And who are the victims? SEN schools, where children with special educational needs were, in fact, often better able to develop their skills" (Schmoll 2017).³ This headline from an article in the German broadsheet *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* from May 26, 2017 appears to harshly criticise the discourse on inclusion as purely ideological and thus divorced from pragmatic considerations (for a matter-of-fact discussion on the public debate on inclusion see Bless 2017: 216; Ruijs & Peetsma 2009: 68). In contrast to this form of argu-

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3 Original quote (translation by authors): "Illusion Inklusion. Wieder sind die Schulen zum Schauplatz einer Ideologie geworden. Das Opfer: die Förderschulen. Dabei konnten sich Kinder mit Lernbehinderungen dort oft besser entfalten".

mentation, the present study aims at contributing empirical arguments to the discourse. In doing so, a special focus will be on contradicting the overgeneralisation that SEN (special educational needs) schools were a casualty of inclusion, even though the policy of inclusion has caused significant changes in both regular and SEN schools. Thus, in this article the findings of the I-TEPS study (Inclusive Teaching of English in Primary Schools) will be presented, a study evaluating the inclusive EFL (English as a foreign language) education at a SEN school, the *Kardinal-von-Galen-Haus* (KVG) in Dinklage in the German federal state of Lower Saxony.⁴ In a nutshell, the KVG is implementing inclusion another way by admitting non-SEN children to its primary branch. Prior results from the evaluation of this school project (Gebhard, Olliges & Schumacher 2013; Gebhard & Schröter 2014, 2017) as well as findings of the present I-TEPS study corroborate that KVG is far from being a victim of inclusion. On the contrary, the school appears to be able to thrive on this educational reform in the wake of the 2006 UN "Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities".

After ratifying the UN convention in Germany in 2009, the idea of one school for all took shape and in Lower Saxony inclusive schooling was introduced in the school year 2013/14 (NKM 2012). As a consequence, there is a multitude of initiatives in schools across Lower Saxony to implement inclusion following this principle: "Keeping special education students in regular classrooms, and bringing support services to the child rather than bringing the child to support services" (Smelter, Rasch & Yudewitz 1994: 35-36). The KVG on the other hand – an SEN school with a special focus on physical and motor disabilities (*Förderschule mit dem Schwerpunkt Körperliche und Motorische Entwicklung*) – places non-SEN children in the SEN school in order to implement inclusion. In this way, the KVG has enriched the multiplicity of inclusive schooling by yet another option. Furthermore, it has even achieved a change of §14 of the education act of Lower Saxony, thus enabling all SEN schools in this state to admit non-SEN children (cf. Gebhard & Schröter 2017: 555).

At the same time, there is a dramatic lack of research evidence, especially for inclusive EFL education at primary level: no study could be identified assessing the effects of inclusive EFL education on the learning achievements of either SEN or non-SEN children at primary level. The existing evidence is situated in other school subjects such as reading (L1) or mathematics. Thus, in order to evaluate inclusive EFL education at KVG, the receptive language skills of non-SEN children attending the school were tested at the end of year 4, shortly before leaving

4 The authors are indebted to the following persons for their invaluable support in conducting this study: Janina Ehmke, Benjamin Möbus (both University of Vechta) and Rebecca Schlieckmann (TU Dortmund).

KVG to continue their (regular) schooling at secondary level. These proficiency scores were then compared to those of primary school children who had attended regular non-SEN primary schools in the same federal state, Lower Saxony. Thus, the objective of the present study is to evaluate the EFL achievements of non-SEN children participating in the inclusive education at KVG. This was in order to address worries expressed by parents at the beginning of the school project, that their non-SEN children might not academically progress at KVG as well as they would at regular primary schools (cf. Gebhard et al. 2013: 121). It was hoped that, just like for mathematics and German before (see 2.3), these worries could be dispelled by their children's EFL test scores. In the following, the theoretical framework and context of the I-TEPS study will be reported followed by the research design and findings from the I-TEPS main study.

2. Theory

2.1 (Inclusive) EFL education in primary schools

Since the school year 2004/05 foreign language education – mostly EFL – has been obligatory in primary schools across all 16 German federal states. In eleven states children begin learning a foreign language in year 3. In five states they even begin learning a foreign language in year 1. However, in autumn 2017 the government of one of the latter, Baden-Württemberg, decided to move primary EFL back to year 3. Thus, beginning with the cohort entering school education in the school year 2018/19, there will be only four federal states in which children start their foreign language education already in year 1 (Brandenburg, Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate).

In Lower Saxony the overarching goal of primary EFL education is to educate children to become communicative, open, tolerant and responsible European citizens (cf. NKM 2006: 7). Alongside the acquisition of communicative and intercultural competencies, children are required to develop language awareness as a prerequisite for multilingualism and lifelong learning (ibid.). In order to achieve these learning objectives the curriculum specifies the following teaching principles: functional target language use, exploiting mistakes as language learning opportunities, using oral language in simple communicative situations (cf. ibid.: 9; also see: Mayer 2013) and age-appropriate topics relevant to the immediate environment of the children. To date, priority is given in Lower Saxony to oral language skills over reading and writing (cf. NKM 2006: 11).

Since the present study explored the receptive language skills, i.e. listening and reading, of children at the end of primary education in year 4 these two constructs will be defined in the following. Even though oral skills take priority in early EFL education in Lower Saxony the present study tested children on their EFL reading skills as well. This is because earlier studies showed that even without explicit teaching of reading, primary EFL learners do develop some proficiency in this domain (cf. Wilden & Porsch 2016). In the context of this study, listening is regarded as the ability to extract information from spoken English. This is a complex, dynamic, active and two-sided (bottom-up and top-down) process during which learners deduce and attribute meaning and interpret what they heard (cf. Field 2010; Nation & Newton 2009; Vandergrift & Goh 2012). The terms reading or reading comprehension describe the ability to extract information from written English texts. This includes various simultaneous processes of understanding in the course of which readers construct meaning with the help of information given in the text (bottom-up), world knowledge gained from experience (top-down) as well as reading strategies (cf. Grabe & Stoller 2011; Nation 2009).

Focusing on inclusion, the heterogeneous classroom, in which the individual skills and dispositions of all learners are being taken into account, is regarded as conducive to the learning process of the whole group. In this context the goal is to integrate learners' predispositions which at first sight appear to be disparate and incompatible (cf. Rohde 2014: 9), e.g. by applying established concepts of differentiation or individualisation (e.g. Hallet 2013). This way all learners ought to be enabled to communicate their thoughts, emotions and needs with the help of the foreign language (cf. Jaehner & Schick 2013: 8). Thus, there are concepts for inclusive EFL education (also see: Burwitz-Melzer, Königs, Riemer & Schmelter 2017), however, it is unclear which approaches work for children with very different SEN. General consensus, however, seems to exist that there are still a number of unresolved challenges in the context of inclusive EFL education (cf. Bartosch & Rohde 2014; Burwitz-Melzer et al. 2017).

2.2 The Kardinal-von-Galen-Haus: An inclusive SEN school

The KVG is a church-operated SEN school in Dinklage, in a rural part of Lower Saxony. It has a special focus on physical and motor disabilities; however, many SEN learners have multiple special needs, e.g. problems with communication and interaction, cognition and learning or emotional and social development (cf. Venth 2015: 208). Beginning in the school year 2012/2013, the KVG has created

one inclusive group in each year 1. These inclusive groups stay together throughout primary education until the end of year 4. The motivation for the inclusive project at KVG is rooted in the belief that, at least in the medium term, learners with physical and motor disabilities will always need the special support of SEN schools. Thus, these children will only be able to benefit from inclusive schooling if the SEN school admits non-SEN learners (cf. Venth 2015: 209). Therefore, the KVG has implemented the idea of an "(SEN) school for all" (Gebhard et al. 2013: 116; transl. by authors). The inclusive primary classes at KVG consist of 12 children without and 6 children with SEN. They usually include children with very diverse SEN in order to avoid homogeneous group formation within the inclusive groups (for a more detailed description of the school see: Venth 2015; Gebhard & Schröter 2017). Aside from the KVG there are three other SEN schools across Germany (*Vincenzschule* Aulhausen, *Jakob-Muth-Schule* Nürnberg, *Waldhofschule* Templin) which have implemented this form of inclusive schooling – the inclusion of non-SEN pupils at SEN schools.

Inclusive education in the primary branch of the KVG follows a concept developed at the school (Venth 2015), which is based on the guiding principle that at no time will children be separated from the rest of the group due to their different academic performance levels. At all times children participate in the lessons together. Further principles of the KVG concept are, for example, a tutoring system or independent and individual work plans for each child in the core subjects German and mathematics. Inclusive EFL education at the school follows the principles of early foreign language education to be found at standard primary schools as well, e.g. playful methods, Total Physical Response or English language songs. Furthermore, the KVG aims at admitting children both with and without SEN from the immediate vicinity of the school (cf. Bless 2017: 218). This is in order to implement the idea of inclusion in the wider community.

2.3 Prior findings evaluating the project school

Along with the implementation of the inclusive project at KVG, Gebhard et al. (2013; Gebhard & Schröter 2014, 2017) carried out various research studies across approximately five years in order to back up this school development. In the following, those findings will be summarised which are most relevant to the present study: prior to the first cohort entering the inclusive group at KVG interviews with the parents showed that among others parents of non-SEN children were apprehensive about their children transferring to standard secondary schools after year 4 (cf. Gebhard et al. 2013: 120-121). Thus, in the interviews they communicated their expectations that the curricula for standard primary education

would be complied with. In this context, the longitudinal test results of reading (L1) as well as mathematics are highly interesting as they show highly positive proficiency scores of the non-SEN pupils in both domains across time (cf. Gebhard & Schröter 2017: 565-567). Furthermore, the children were repeatedly surveyed about how they experienced school and the responses of all children – with and without SEN – showed they feel very satisfied and especially appear to enjoy a positive classroom atmosphere (cf. *ibid*: 565). Thus, the authors of the evaluation study conclude that parents' worries that their children's academic progress might suffer at the KVG compared to a standard primary school were unjustified (cf. Gebhard & Schröter 2014: 349). With the exception of Gebhard et al. (2013; Gebhard & Schröter 2014, 2017) there are hardly any empirical findings about inclusive SEN schooling. It is yet unclear, however, whether the positive findings about this inclusive SEN school project can be confirmed regarding primary learners' EFL proficiency.

2.4 Prior findings on learner achievements in inclusive education

In general, there seems to be a lack of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of inclusive learning environments (cf. Bless 2017: 224; Budde, Blasse & Johannsen 2016; Burwitz-Melzer 2017: 38-39; Cole, Waldron, Majd & Hasazi 2004: 137; Kocaj, Kuhl, Kroth, Pant & Stanat 2014: 170; Springob 2017: 19). The available findings, however, illustrate that drawing generalising conclusions is highly problematic considering the very high level of diversity and heterogeneity among children with SEN (cf. Martschinke, Kopp & Ratz 2012: 188). In this context Budde et al. (2016) especially highlight the need for substantial empirical research since the discourse on inclusion too often is dominated by socio-political, rather than empirical-pedagogical argumentations (cf. Bless 2017: 216). Considering the research interest of the present study, there is insufficient evidence on the impact inclusive schooling has on the academic development of children without SEN (Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm & Elbaum 1998: 154) and hardly any evidence on the development of learners' language proficiency in inclusive EFL education – with the exception of Springob (2017). Focusing on primary inclusive EFL education, no prior studies could be identified. Thus, in reviewing prior research for the present study there will be a focus on the academic development of learners without SEN a) in inclusive EFL education at secondary level and b) in inclusive schooling in other school subjects.

In a longitudinal study Springob (2017) examined the development of learners' EFL proficiency from year 5 to year 6 (age approximately 11 to 12). In doing so, he compared the development of proficiency scores from children without

SEN in an inclusive group at secondary level I (*Gymnasium*) with those in a non-inclusive group at the same school. Data was collected on learners' reading, writing, grammar as well as mediation skills (cf. *ibid.*: 249, 253). Additionally, data was collected on learners' traditional test scores (*Klassenarbeit*) as well as oral exams at the end of year 6. The findings illustrate that non-SEN pupils in the inclusive group score better at the end of year 5 than children in the non-inclusive parallel group (cf. *ibid.*: 250). In comparing the longitudinal development, Springob found EFL proficiency scores comparable to those in the non-inclusive group (cf. *ibid.*: 292). Based on these findings Springob concludes that pupils in the inclusive group are not disadvantaged regarding their EFL education compared to learners in the non-inclusive group (cf. *ibid.*: 294). Furthermore, he points out that the learners with SEN attending this school, who were educated and tested on the basis of a different curriculum, showed satisfactory results (cf. *ibid.*: 295). He thus concludes that all learners – with and without SEN – demonstrated a positive academic development throughout the study.

Studies on the academic achievements of learners without SEN in inclusive settings in other school subjects do not show a clear tendency and in their research review, Klemm and Preuss-Lausitz (2011: 48; also see Möller 2013: 28) conclude that the available findings are inconsistent. Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) draw a similar conclusion in their review on the effects of inclusive education on learners with and without SEN in which they summarize the central findings on the academic and socio-emotional development in quantitative studies with either control group or pretest-posttest designs since 1999. In doing so, they only considered studies researching the joint schooling of non-SEN learners and "children with mild to moderate disabilities [including] children with mild to moderate learning disabilities, children with mild to moderate behavioural difficulties and children with mild to moderate psychological difficulties" (Ruijs & Peetsma 2009: 68-69). The authors emphasize the difficulty of drawing distinct conclusions from the available findings about the effects of inclusive schooling on the development of non-SEN learners. The different studies reported both positive as well as negative and even no or inconclusive effects (Ruijs & Peetsma 2009: 76). In spite of this, in a recent research review, Bless (2017: 219) points out one central finding of research efforts about the impact of inclusive schooling: non-SEN learners do not seem to be disadvantaged in their academic progress through the inclusion of learners with SEN.

By way of example, some of these studies will be sketched out in the following: In a cross-sectional study Feyerer (1998: 135-136) compared the academic achievement of year 8 learners without SEN in integrative groups (n = 139) with those attending non-integrative parallel groups (n = 512). For the school subjects EFL, maths and German (as language of schooling in the Austrian context of the

study), he did not find significant differences for either high- or average-performing non-SEN learners. He thus concluded that integrative schooling was no disadvantage for non-SEN learners. In a pretest-posttest study Sharpe, York and Knight (1994) compared the academic achievement in reading (L1), language arts and mathematics of primary learners in an inclusive group with those learners in a non-inclusive environment. "The overall findings of this preliminary study do not indicate a decline in academic or behavioural performance of classmates educated in inclusive classrooms" (ibid.: 286). Thus, the authors reject the assumption that inclusive education might have adverse effects on non-SEN learners. In another longitudinal primary school study, Klingner et al. (1998) examined the academic progress of learners with ($n = 25$) and without SEN ($n = 89$) over one school year. To this end, learners in years 3 through 6 at one inclusive primary school were tested at the beginning and end of the school year in reading (L1) and maths. The authors report a positive academic development of high-achieving learners, yet a lack of significant improvement among a subset of low- to average-achieving learners (ibid.: 159). In another longitudinal primary school study, Cole et al. (2004) compared the academic progress in reading (L1) and mathematics of non-SEN learners in an inclusive setting to those in a non-inclusive setting. In the inclusive group non-SEN learners learned together with learners with "mild disabilities" (ibid.: 138). The authors of the study report that non-SEN learners showed better academic progress in the inclusive setting compared to learners in the non-inclusive setting.

In contrast to these rather positive findings, there are also studies which report no or negative effects on the academic progress of non-SEN learners in inclusive settings (e.g. see Möller 2013: 27-28; Ruijs & Peetsma 2009: 75-76). Many authors comment on the inconclusive findings by highlighting the importance of the respective teaching approach in different contexts. For example, Klemm and Preuss-Lausitz (2011: 49) point out in their review that different findings appear to be linked to the overall conditions, teaching methods, classroom management and support structures within a given school. Similarly, Textor (2015: 69) – in discussing whether inclusive education is beneficial or disadvantageous for non-SEN learners – points out that high-performing learners benefit in inclusive groups because of the altered teaching methodology, such as differentiation or team teaching, compared to non-inclusive parallel groups at the same school. She furthermore suggests that under-performing learners more often stay in the inclusive group compared to non-inclusive parallel groups and are therefore supported through the SEN personnel without actually having SEN status. Similarly, Ruijs und Peetsma identify individual schools as a more influential factor in the academic development of learners than inclusive schooling as such: "differences be-

tween schools seem to be more important than inclusive or non-inclusive education" (2009: 76). They detect a varying effect of inclusive schooling in such a way that depending on study and context either high-performing or under-performing non-SEN learners benefit more from inclusive schooling than others. Thus, in a nutshell good and efficient inclusive teaching seems to simply be good teaching – with a high level of teaching quality regardless whether the learning group consists of children with or/and without SEN (also see Gebhard & Schröter 2014: 340).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research question

The cross-sectional I-TEPS study addresses the aforementioned research gap on inclusive primary EFL education by a) testing the receptive English language skills (listening and reading comprehension) of non-SEN learners at the project school at the end of primary education and b) comparing them to those of non-SEN learners attending regular primary schools. In doing so, it addresses the following research question: At the end of year 4 (age 10) do non-SEN children attending an innovative inclusive primary SEN school show receptive English language skills comparable to those of children attending a regular school?

3.2 Instruments and sample

Data was collected using a paper-pencil test with 327 children at the end of year 4 in Lower Saxony, just before the summer holidays in 2017. The receptive English language skills were tested by using multiple choice and short answer items (listening comprehension with 71 items and reading comprehension with 122 items) applying a testlet-design. The tests were adapted from sample papers published by Cambridge English Language Assessment (e.g. CELA 2013: 15-16 and 2014: 4, 14-15, 46-47) as well as from the EVENING study (e.g. Paulick & Groot-Wilken 2009: 181-183). Each participant received two testlets for reading and two for listening comprehension with a testing time of 15 minutes per testlet. Testing was followed by the learners answering a questionnaire about their background etc. (about 10 minutes).

To measure the cultural capital as an indicator of the socio-economic background (see Stubbe & Goy 2013: 205) the children were asked the so-called book question (number of books present in their home; five categories: 0-10, 11-25, 26-

100, 101-200, or more than 200). The question was visually supported through pictograms of bookshelves representing the five categories. In order to identify home languages, the learners were asked how frequently they speak German at home (always, almost always, sometimes, or never).

The quasi-experimental group at KVG consists of 12 students. In this study, their mean proficiency in listening and reading is compared to the control group ($n = 306$), i.e. children attending regular primary schools. Beforehand, both groups were compared with regard to various background variables (via t-tests depending on the type of variable): gender, use of German as a home language, age, socio-economic background (number of books at home), and recent grades in EFL. The comparison shows no statistically significant differences between the groups with regard to the pupils' background variables with the exception of German as home language and the proportion of girls (see Table 1). In the quasi-experimental group there are fewer girls than in the control group and the home language more often is German.

Table 1: Pupils' background variables⁵

	KvG (n = 12)	Control group (n = 306)
Gender	girls = 33.3 % boys = 66.6 %	girls = 50.5 % boys = 49.5 %
German as home language (scale 1-4 from "always" to "never")	$M = 1.09 (.30)$	$M = 1.66 (.89)$
	$p = .035$	
Age	$M = 9.64 (.67)$	$M = 9.94 (.68)$
	$p = .176$	
Number of books at home (scale 1-5 from "0-10 books" to "more than 200 books")	$M = 3.42 (.79)$	$M = 3.03 (1.23)$
	$p = .131$	
Grade in EFL (1-6)	$M = 1.90 (.88)$	$M = 2.22 (.81)$
	$p = .278$	

3.3 Analysis

After coding the items, proficiency scores were obtained by applying a simple one-dimensional logistic item response model (Rasch 1960/1980) estimating plausible values for each learner. Item characteristics were checked for conformity by assessing indicators such as discrimination parameters, mean squared errors (MNSQ), and t-values. Items were scaled separately for each domain. The final scores were standardized to a mean of 500 points with a standard deviation of 100, a procedure conventionally used in school achievement studies. Children with SEN were not included when estimating the proficiency scores (i.e. 12 learners in the whole sample). For each of the 21 classes, a mean score for listening and reading proficiency was estimated. The control group had an average number of 16 learners per class.

⁵ M = mean; standard deviation in brackets.

4. Findings

4.1 Differences in mean proficiency

The mean proficiency in listening comprehension for the quasi-experimental group is 511.22 ($SD = 84.85$) and in reading comprehension 469.42 ($SD = 101.78$). This indicates that the listening skills of the learners in this group are above and their reading skills below the average of 500 points. The distribution of reading skills is higher than for listening in the quasi-experimental group. The learners in the control group achieved on average 491.94 points ($SD = 37.72$) in the listening test and 499.57 points in the reading test ($SD = 24.96$). In order to compare means scores by groups, simple variance analysis was conducted with a one-way ANOVA. Results show that the quasi-experimental group did not perform significantly better (or worse) in the listening test than the control group ($F[1, 326] = 3.125, p = .078$). However, the reading comprehension skills of children in the quasi-experimental group are significantly lower in comparison to those in the control group ($F[1, 326] = 17.469, p > .001; \eta^2 = .051$).

4.2 Differences in mean proficiency controlled by class composition

Furthermore, a simple regression analysis was conducted in order to assess whether differences in EFL proficiency between quasi-experimental and control group persist when controlling for further class characteristics.⁶ In doing so, indicators of class composition, i.e. mean scores per class for cultural capital as well as German as home language, were included in the model. The results (see Table 2) show that there is an effect of being in either the control or experimental group: listening comprehension skills are significantly higher and reading comprehension skills are significantly lower in the quasi-experimental group when controlling for class characteristics. When controlling for these variables, learners in the quasi-experimental group achieved on average 23.9 points more in the listening test than those in the control group. However, they achieved 29.6 points fewer in the reading test.

⁶ An ANCOVA as a possible alternative showed similar results. However, the precondition for conducting an ANCOVA, i.e. no differences between the groups, was not fulfilled given the differences between quasi-experimental and control group regarding the variable "German as home language").

Table 2: Results from regression analysis

	Dependent variable	
	Listening comprehension	Reading comprehension
Fixed effects	495.91	495.32
Socio-economic background (class level)	-8.6* (4.0)	-.03ns (2.8)
German as home language (class level)	12.2* (5.1)	1.8ns (3.4)
Group (quasi-experimental group) ⁷	23.9* (10.8)	-29.6** (7.3)

5. Discussion

In summary, the I-TEPS study found that non-SEN children learning EFL in a primary inclusive SEN school demonstrate listening skills comparable to those of children attending regular primary schools. Yet, these learners performed less well in the EFL reading comprehension test. Based on prior findings regarding inclusive (EFL) education, similar results for the quasi-experimental group in both domains were expected.

These findings of the study evaluating primary EFL education in the school development project at KVG are first and foremost positive and encouraging. Just as earlier evaluation studies (Gebhard & Schröter 2017) found at the school, non-SEN learners seem to have good opportunities to develop their English proficiency in this SEN school for all. In compliance with the current curriculum for primary EFL education in Lower Saxony (NKM 2006: 11) the non-SEN learners at KVG demonstrated excellent listening skills at the end of year 4. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that providing sufficient opportunities for non-SEN children to practise their reading skills in English is a challenge in this particular inclusive setting. This aspect gives food for thought in spite of the curriculum giving clear priority to oral skills. As several earlier studies (e.g. Paulick & Groot-Wilken 2009; Wilden & Porsch 2016) showed, primary children can achieve rather good English reading skills even without explicit teaching of EFL reading. Similarly, the children in the control group of the present study showed significantly better

⁷ Reference group: control group; * $p > .05$; ** $p > .001$; ns = not significant ($p > .05$); standard deviations in brackets.

reading skills than the learners attending the project school. Thus, in this particular inclusive context, developing learners' EFL reading skills appears to be a challenge.

In order to validate these findings they were discussed with the staff involved with primary EFL education at KVG. Thus, in the following section, the teachers' interpretation of these findings will be sketched out; at the same time it will be outlined what implications the findings will have on their daily teaching practice. Both EFL teachers involved with the school project highlighted the fact that – according to the curriculum – teaching oral skills takes priority in their day-to-day English language teaching, also because they very much rely on the textbook, "Playway", used at the school. Thus, they linked the positive findings for learners' listening comprehension to various routine classroom elements such as, for example, practising topical language chunks (i.e. Today is Friday./It's the third of May./It's sunny and dry./It's summer.) every morning during tutor time (*Morgenkreis*). As another example, the teachers reported to always having introduced new words orally with picture cards and only later introducing the words in writing. However, they also reported the children getting impatient with this procedure and thus introducing the written words earlier on.

Regarding their learners' reading skills, the school staff critically discussed whether they should put greater emphasis on teaching the written skills to the detriment of the oral skills. They tentatively decided to include more reading activities without reducing the teaching of oral skills. This will also be in accordance with the new curriculum, which is going to be implemented in Lower Saxony beginning with the school year 2018/2019. In comparison to the previous one, the new curriculum stipulates a more pronounced role of the written skills in primary EFL education in Lower Saxony (cf. NKM 2018: 11, 14). Also, the teachers reported their observation that their pupils are actually eager to read and seem to like reading English. Various ideas were discussed on how to proceed in increasing the scope of English language reading activities such as, for example, exploring resources for independent reading to fit the inclusive concept of the school or replacing a text book unit by a unit using a picture book. Another idea was to extend an extracurricular afternoon activity the school already provides, the reading mentor programme (*Lesepaten*). For this programme, the school finds relatives or student teachers who regularly come to school in the afternoon to practise reading with individual children. The school will look into finding mentors who will practise reading in English with individual pupils. Furthermore, the teachers discussed keeping the focus on oral skills throughout year 3 but increasing the amount of written skills towards the end of year 4, also in order to prepare pupils' for their transition to secondary school in year 5. In this context they also discussed contacting the local secondary schools to exchange information on EFL

education and thus generally facilitate their learners' transition from primary to secondary school (cf. Kolb 2011).

In discussing these findings, the following limitations of the present study ought to be considered. On the one hand, the size of the quasi-experimental group is rather small in contrast to the control group. The control group is a convenience sample and the different classes participating in the I-TEPS study differed in their sizes (classes with less than 10 students were not included in the analysis). In all participating primary schools all learners were invited to participate in the study. However, due to lack of parental consent in some schools there is a higher participation rate of children with a non-migrant background in the whole sample. On the other hand, the quasi-experimental group in this study consisted of only one class taught by one individual EFL teacher. This is due to the I-TEPS study evaluating a school development project and thus assessing non-SEN learners' EFL proficiencies in a natural setting. Therefore, these findings are highly dependent on the particular school context as well as the professional competencies of this individual EFL teacher. In order to further explore these findings, classroom observations have been conducted as part of a current dissertation project (Ehmke, in preparation) which will give further insights into the actual EFL classroom processes in this group.

The I-TEPS study has given first empirical insights into EFL education at primary level. The findings of the study encourage the school to continue their innovative school development project with only slight adjustments to their EFL programme. As is often the case, the present study, aside from finding some answers, has left a few other open questions. For example, the I-TEPS study only focused on the achievement of non-SEN learners in this particular inclusive setting. The above mentioned study by Ehmke (in preparation) will therefore also consider the development of SEN learners. Furthermore, tracing the longitudinal development of the learners participating in this school project would be informative. So far, no data is available to this end. However, for ten of the non-SEN learners continuing their school education at local schools the marks are available which pupils attained for their school reports after the first half of year 5: for four pupils attending a *Gymnasium* they are *sehr gut* (1), twice *gut* (2), *befriedigend* (3); for six pupils attending an *Oberschule* they are *sehr gut* (1), *gut* (2) and four times *befriedigend* (3) (on a scale from 1 to 6; 5 and 6 are insufficient). Of course, these marks have only a rather limited explanatory power for the question of longitudinal development. However, they can be regarded as an initial indicator that attending primary EFL education in the inclusive SEN context at KVG has prepared these children well for continuing their secondary schooling. Thus, it appears that inclusion at KVG is no illusion.

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