



Preface

This special issue on *Teaching Young Language Learners* celebrates the extraordinary contributions of Dr. Vera Savić, whose illustrious career has been marked by her pioneering research, innovative pedagogy, and deep commitment to nurturing multilingualism in young learners. Dr. Savić, an internationally recognized scholar in applied linguistics and early foreign language education, has profoundly shaped the field through her extensive research, impactful publications, and visionary teaching methodologies.

Dr. Savić's academic journey began with a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Belgrade, followed by a Master's degree focusing on literary translation. Her doctoral research, completed at the University of Novi Sad, addressed reading difficulties in English as a foreign language, laying the groundwork for her lifelong exploration of language learning among young learners. Over her decades-long career, Dr. Savić served as Assistant Professor of English Language and Applied Linguistics at the University of Kragujevac, where she led courses spanning English for Academic Purposes, TEYL methodologies, and intercultural language teaching at undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels.

Her extensive portfolio of academic work includes authoring and editing landmark books, such as *The 6 Principles for Exemplary Teaching of English Learners: Young Learners in a Multilingual World* and *Teaching Young Language Learners in South Eastern Europe: A Multidimensional Research on Policy and Pedagogical Practices*. Dr. Savić has published prolifically in top-tier journals, addressing themes such as early literacy, translanguaging, inclusive education, and assessment in multilingual classrooms. She has also been a prominent figure in international projects, conferences, and teacher training initiatives, earning accolades and grants from global institutions like TESOL International Association and Erasmus+.

Dr. Savić's research agenda reflects a forward-looking commitment to addressing the challenges and opportunities of teaching in increasingly diverse and digital classrooms. Her innovative work on theme-based instruction, graphic novels for intercultural education, and multimodal materials highlights her passion for engaging young learners through creativity and inclusivity. She has consistently advocated for integrating global citizenship and digital competence into early language education, ensuring young learners are not only linguistically but also socially and culturally prepared for the interconnected world.

This special issue is a testament to Dr. Savić's enduring legacy. Each paper included here echoes her multifaceted contributions to the field, exploring themes she championed throughout her career:

1. **Emergent Literacy and Narrative Skills** highlight the foundational importance of storytelling in multilingual contexts, a theme central to Dr. Savić's early work on reading and intercultural literacy.

2. **Translanguaging Practices** in multilingual classrooms align with her advocacy for dynamic and inclusive pedagogies, reflecting her research on context-sensitive approaches to early foreign language teaching.
3. **Innovative Pedagogies**, such as the use of LEGO® blocks in writing instruction, resonate with her commitment to integrating creativity into language learning.
4. **Digital Competences** and teacher training further extend her influence, addressing the urgent need for equipping educators to teach in the 21st-century classroom.
5. **Integration and Multicultural Education** themes echo her work on inclusive practices and global citizenship, showcasing research on refugee education and bilingualism.

The articles in this special issue are arranged to build a coherent narrative that reflects the multifaceted themes of Dr. Vera Savić's work and their relevance to teaching young language learners. The collection begins with foundational insights into early literacy and concludes with practical strategies for inclusive education, offering a seamless progression of ideas.

We begin with *Delving into Emergent Literacy: Examining Narrative Skills of Monolingual and Bilingual Preschoolers in Greece* by Isaak Papadopoulos, Anna Hall and Maria Eleni Bourogianni. This article establishes the foundational importance of narrative and literacy skills in early education, offering theoretical insights on emergent literacy. It sets the stage for understanding how young learners develop the essential skills that underpin their future language education.

Following this, *Literacy Skills Development in L1 within and outside an Other Language Enriched Environment: A Study in the Greek Early Childhood Education* by Pieter Schalk Jansen and Isaak Papadopoulos builds on early literacy themes, focusing on how bilingual education influences first language development. This exploration highlights the intricate relationship between multilingual environments and language acquisition.

Next, *Optimizing Strategy Training in Primary Education: Enhancing Learning Outcomes for Young Students* by Dominika Chrobak introduces pedagogical methods to enhance language learning strategies in primary education. This article transitions from theoretical discussions to practical strategies that improve young learners' educational experiences.

Next, *Bilingualism, Cognitive Flexibility, and Educational Outcomes in Young Learners: Exploring the Benefits of Early Language Acquisition* by Amy Sepioł examines the cognitive advantages of bilingualism. This paper explores the impact of bilingualism on cognitive flexibility and attentional control, linking these benefits to educational success and emphasizing the value of bilingual programs.

The collection then explores the dynamic practices of multilingual classrooms in *Functions of Translanguaging in Primary School CLIL and EFL Settings* by Gema Gayete Domínguez. This article delves into translanguaging as an effective pedagogical practice, reflecting the innovative and inclusive approaches championed by Dr. Savić.

Broadening the discussion, *Exploring Language Preferences and Perceptions: A Comparative Study of English and Yoruba among Adolescents in Oyo State, Nigeria* by Jekayinfa, Oyeyemi Jumoke, Bello, Yekeen, Badru, Surajudeen Adewale and Aburime, Aminat Ozohu examines cultural and linguistic dynamics in adolescent education. This work underscores the importance of cultural context in language learning, resonating with Dr. Savić's emphasis on intercultural awareness.

The collection proceeds with *Teaching Writing Skills with LEGO® Blocks* by Monika Wójtowicz, which highlights innovative methods for teaching writing skills to young learners. The creative use of LEGO® blocks exemplifies the integration of engaging and hands-on learning tools in language education.



Next, *Digital Competences – as a 21st Century Meta-Competence* by Paulina Forma and Anna Winiarczyk addresses the critical role of digital skills in modern education. This article emphasizes the necessity of equipping young learners with digital literacy to thrive in contemporary educational environments.

In *Training Pre-School and Early School Pedagogy Students to Teach English* by Małgorzata Szulc-Kurpaska, Sabina A. Nowak and Werona Król-Gierat, the discussion shifts to teacher preparation and belief modification. The article examines how effective teacher training supports young learners in language acquisition, a theme central to Dr. Savić's career.

Finally, the issue concludes with *Facilitating the Integration of Ukrainian Students into Polish Education* by Adam Krzyk and Jacek Porzycki. This article presents real-world applications of inclusive educational strategies, addressing the needs of displaced children and underscoring the importance of creating supportive learning environments for all learners.

Together, these articles honor Dr. Savić's legacy by exploring key themes of early literacy, innovative pedagogies, intercultural understanding, and inclusive education. They provide a comprehensive reflection on her enduring impact on the field of teaching young language learners.

Dr. Vera Savić has left an indelible mark on the field of early language education. This special issue seeks to honor her legacy by advancing the rich conversations and innovative practices she inspired. It is our hope that the insights contained herein will not only celebrate her contributions but also ignite new pathways for research and practice in teaching young language learners.

Editors

Werona Król-Gierat

University of the National Education Commission (Kraków, Poland),
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6522-2550>, werona.krol-gierat@uken.krakow.pl

Isaak Papadopoulos

International Hellenic University (Thessaloniki, Greece)
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9285-7462>, isaakpapad@ihu.gr

