Primary Modern Languages: the impact of teaching approaches on attainment and preparedness for secondary school language learning. Funded by the Nuffield Foundation

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Primary ML

- Range of reports on provision of language teaching in schools (e.g. Muijs et al, 2005)

- Less attention to outcomes of such provision for pupil attainment

- Very little research-based evidence to indicate which teaching approaches might be most effective for young language learners

Primary ML

- 'Younger = better' argument not really supported for instructed contexts (Muňoz (2008) – evidence equivocal

- However, nature of teaching received seems to be an important influencing factor (Johnstone, 2002)

- 'Oracy' and 'literacy' equally weighted in Key Stage 2 Framework, but in practice oracy predominates and reading/writing skills less well-developed (Cable et al, 2010; Ofsted, 2011); low use of verbs and high use of formulaic phrases

Transition to Key Stage 3

- Process of transition key in terms of strengthening learner motivation for, and competence in, LL at Key Stage 3 (Bolster, 2009)

- We know very little about the kind of learning in primary school that best prepares learners for this further study

- Strong evidence that lack of a sense of progress undermines motivation at KS3 (Erler & Macaro, 2011)

Research questions

- What is the impact at the end of Key Stage 2 of two different teaching approaches in Primary Languages on:

- a) Children's knowledge of the underlying system of the foreign language (gender, adjectival agreement, simple present tense verbs)

- b) Children's preparedness for language learning at secondary school, in terms of their confidence in foreign language learning, their level of motivation and the longer-term development of their knowledge of the language system at secondary school?

Methodology

- Longitudinal, over two years (2012-2014)
- *Participants*
- Approx. 250 children from 9 schools, matched on various measures (FSM, EAL, SEN), divided into an oracy and a literacy group, based on their actual practice
- *Teaching approaches*
- 1. A general 'competence model' that aims to develop children's linguistic attainment (Cable et al, 2010: p.22), but which focuses primarily on developing oracy skills;
- 2. A more literacy-based approach, where reading and writing activities are integrated into a general competence model, alongside oracy skills.

Design

Session 1, Year 5 (Summer)	Language tasks
Session 2, Year 6 (Spring)	Language tasks
Session 3, Year 6 (Summer)	Questionnaire
Session 4, Year 7 (Autumn)	Language tasks, Questionnaire
Session 5, Year 7 (summer)	Questionnaire

Participants

	Oracy	Literacy	Total
Time 1 (Summer Year 5)	102	152	254
Time 2 & 3 (Spring/ Summer Year 6)	97	146	243
Time 4 (Autumn Year 7)	72	93	165
Time 5 (Summer Year 7, questionnaire only)	46	53	99

Research Methods – sentence repetition

- Listen to sentences and repeat them verbatim.

- Sentences are relatively long in order to tax the children's processing ability enough so that they have to analyse the sentences they hear and reconstruct their meaning and grammar instead of parroting.

- Children can repeat and correct the sentences they hear only if they have acquired the grammatical features involved (Lust et al, 1996). Therefore, this method provides a window into the grammatical system of the learner

Research Methods – sentence repetition

- Sentence repetition tasks can assess the pronounciation and sound system (phonology) , the grammar (morphology and syntax), and meaning (semantics);

- They can help us identify the learners' strengths and weaknesses in those areas;

- They are widely used in language learning settings and also in speech & language therapy settings;

- They are easy to administer and score;

- They are quick tasks.

Research Methods – sentence repetition

- Three grammatical features 8 items per feature :

  - article-noun agreement (gender)
  - adjective-noun agreement (gender)
  - simple present tense verbs
  - Nouns and verbs taken from commonly used PL schemes of work, cross-checked with schools' Schemes of Work

Research Methods – oral production (Photo description Task, PT)

- Three grammatical features 6 items per feature :

    – article-noun agreement
    – adjective-noun agreement
    – simple present tense verbs

Photo description – Part A

- Learners saw picture of a noun

- Were asked 'Qu'est-ce que c'est?' (What is it?)

- Asked to reply in a full sentence starting with 'C'est…', giving noun+ adjective

- Task fully explained in English to learners before they started and worked through a practice item

Photo description – Part B

- Learners saw picture of an 'action'

- Were asked 'Qu'est-ce qu'il fait?' (What's he doing?)

- Asked to reply in a full sentence starting with 'Il…'

- Task fully explained in English to learners before they started

Gender sorting task

- Administered right at the start to check if learners knew the gender of the nouns we were targeting
- Shown cards with pictures of target nouns, e.g. 'crayon'
- Researcher said the noun in French, but without the article
- Learners had to place each card in a basket marked either 'La/Une' or 'Le/Un'

Motivation/self-efficacy

- Self-efficacy – learners' beliefs in their ability to complete a task successfully

- Questionnaire including self-efficacy items for present and future French learning (oracy and literacy activities): e.g.

➢ **How well do you think you will be able to do the following things by the end of Year 7 – e.g.** Read a short letter from a French boy or girl and understand what it is about

- Attitudes to learning French – enjoyment, importance, travel, jobs

Other important data

- English literacy (reading and writing) scores

- Teacher confidence and training (questionnaire)

- Teaching time for French

- Parent/carer questionnaire: pupil language background, contact with French, level of parental education

School groupings

- Groupings of schools: more difficult than initially anticipated

- Questionnaires (Yr5), lesson observations in Years 6

- Schools allocated a literacy score from 1-5, based on all these sources (1= very oracy; 5= very literacy)

- Score for observation allocated on the basis of KS2 Framework Objectives addressed – gave us two groups

- Division less clear-cut than we had hoped

- Higher level literacy activities not much in evidence

Literacy objectives

- Eg:
- L3.1 Recognise some familiar words in written form
- L3.3 Experiment with the writing of simple words
- L4.2 Follow a short familiar text, listening and reading at the same time

Literacy objectives

- L5.1 Re-read frequently a variety of short texts;

- L5.3 Write words, phrases and short sentences, using a reference

- L6.1 Read and understand the main points and some detail from a short written passage

- L6.4 Write sentences on a range of topics using a model

Results

- Progress across each task years 5, 6, 7
- Effect of teaching approach
- Which factors have the biggest impact on attainment?
- (Individual differences – gender, L1 literacy levels – Louise Courtney)
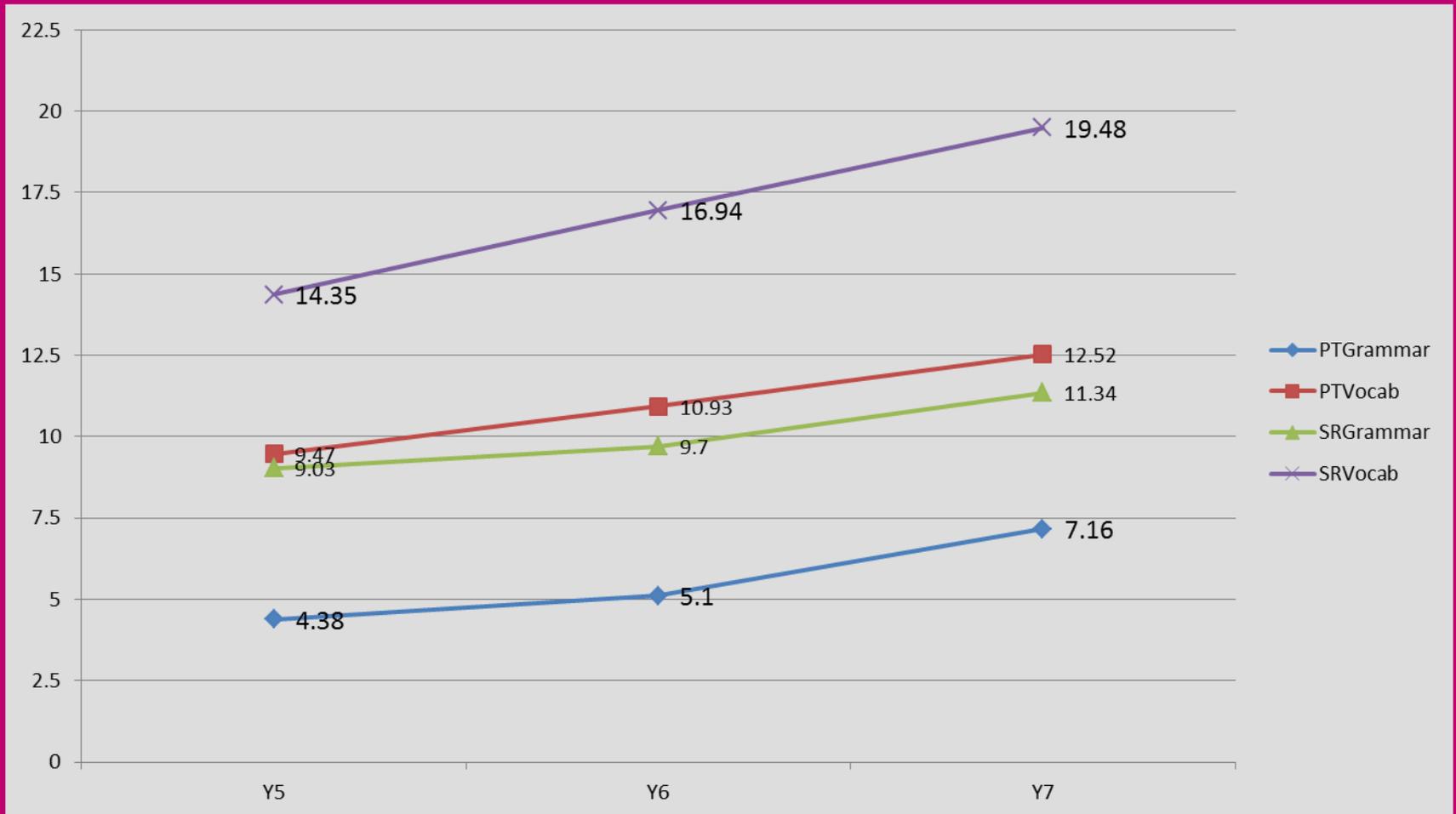- Motivation/self-efficacy

Results

- Small but statistically significant improvement across the time points for gender, SR and PT (grammar and vocabulary)
- Statistical significance indicated by * in following slides
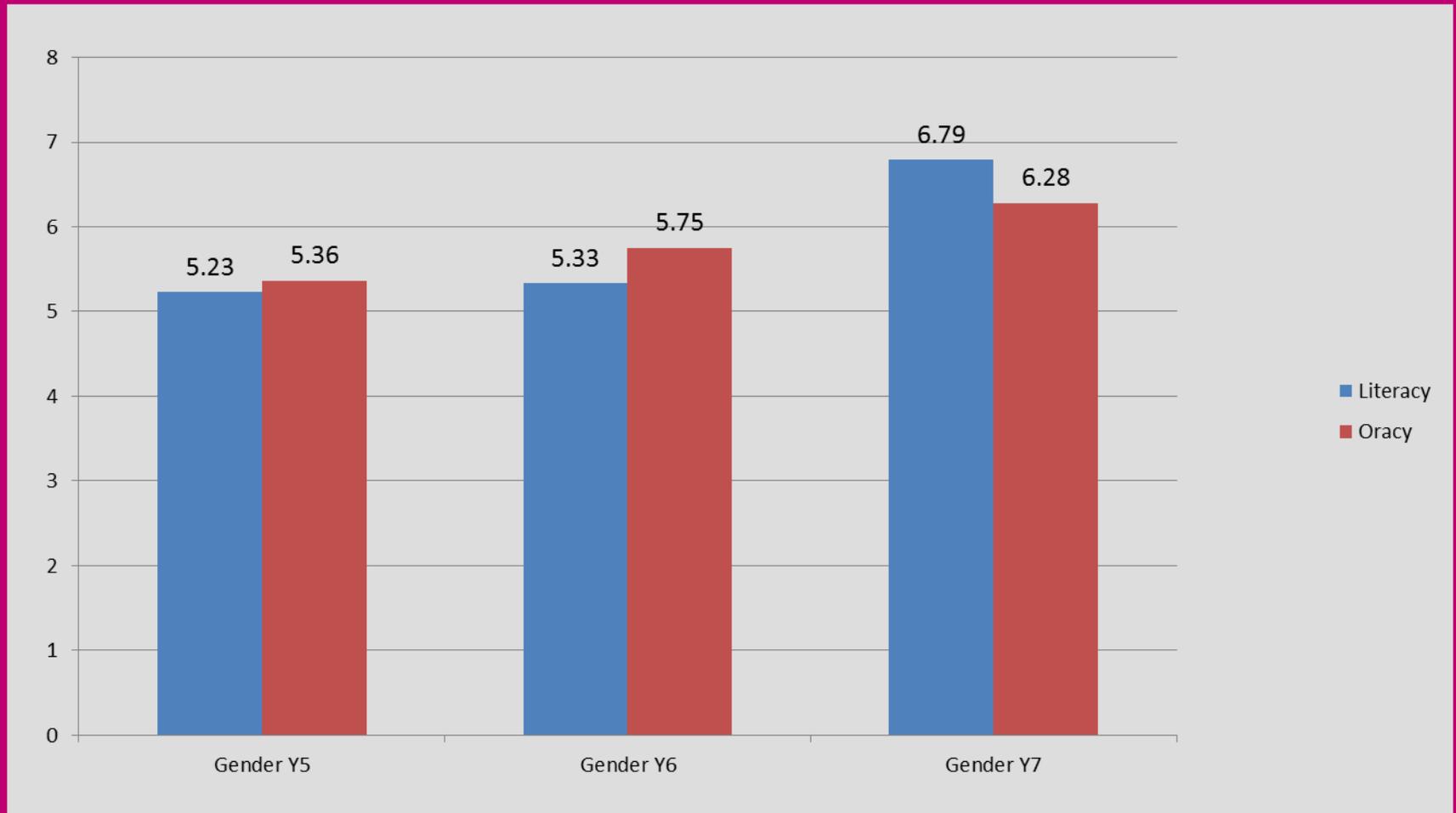
Results by task – Years 5-7

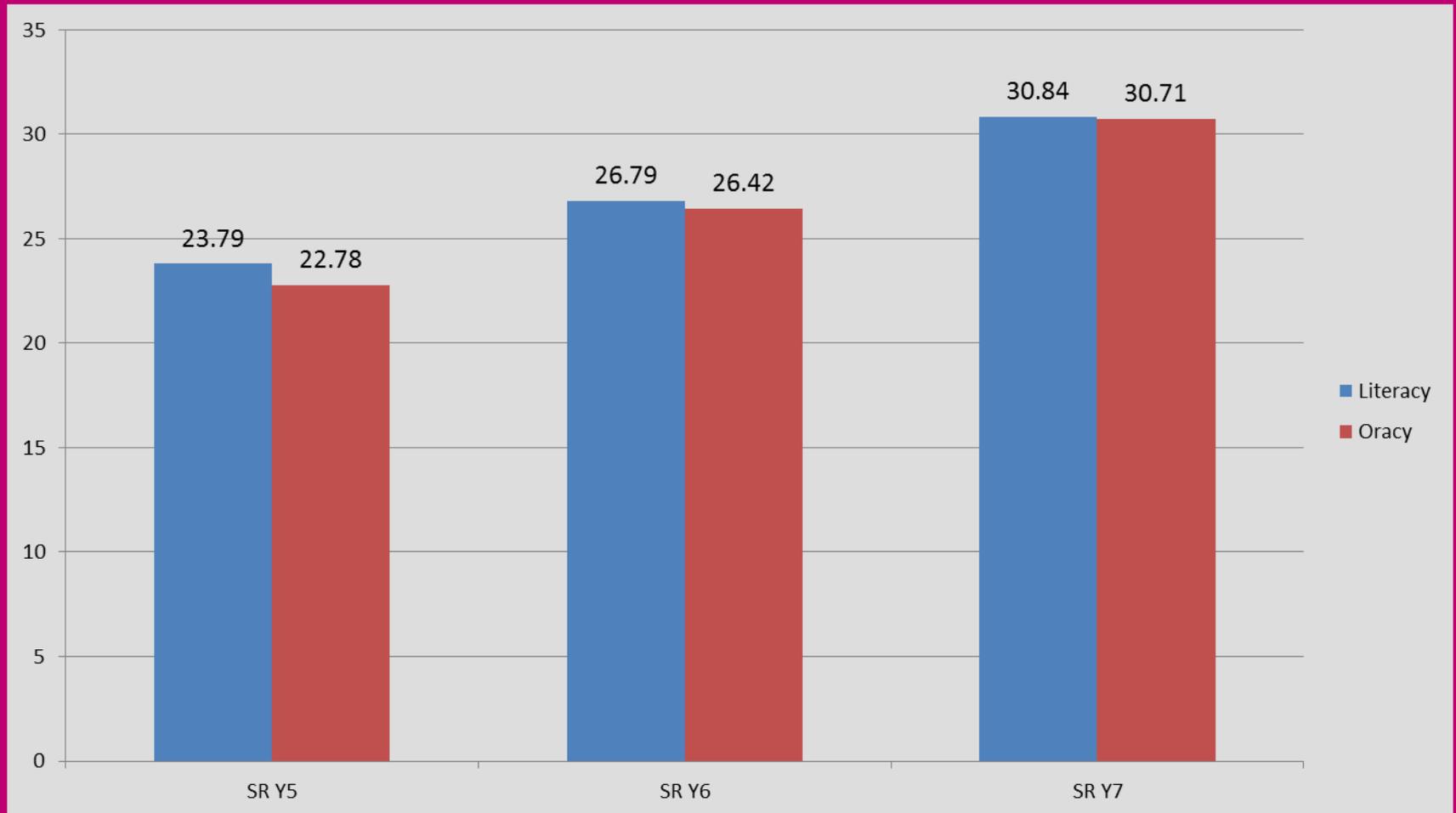# Results – grammar vs vocabulary - sentence repetition and photo description
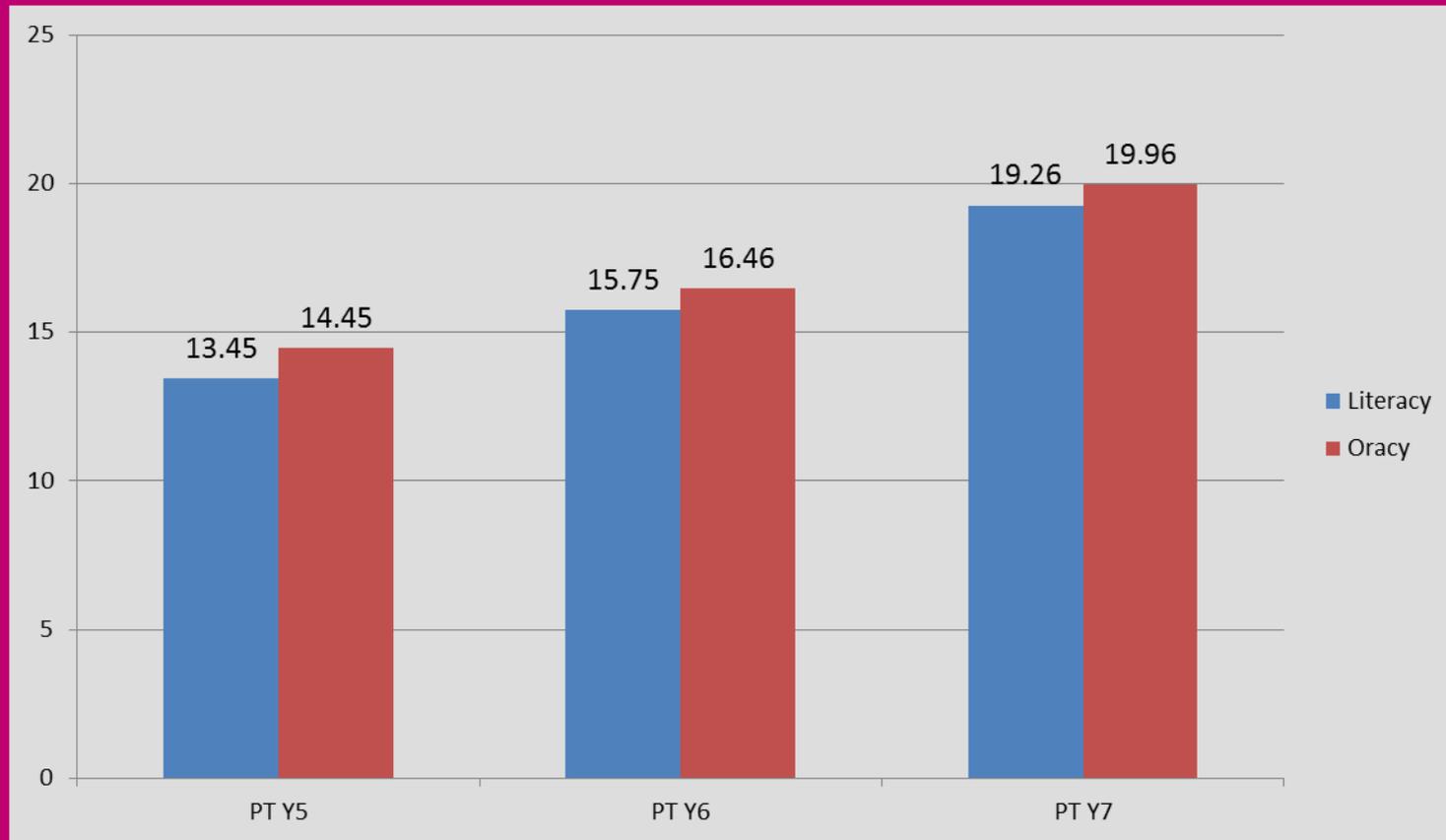
Results – effect of teaching approach Gender task

Results – effect of teaching approach Sentence Repetition task

Results – effect of teaching approach Photo Description task

Differences by approach/task

- Some differences detected when vocabulary and grammar scores for SR and PT looked at separately, and if teaching time is controlled:

- In the PT task the oracy learners always outperform the literacy learners for grammar and significantly so in Rd3 (Year 7)

- However, the literacy learners score significantly higher for PT vocabulary in Rd 3, and are more confident on part of the task, AND:

- For SR task, literacy learners always ahead on grammar (and significantly so in Yr 6)

ALSO:

- Some indication that learners with low English literacy may benefit from a literacy approach

Factors influencing results

- English literacy level the factor that correlated most strongly with attainment levels, followed by school (teacher factors, excluding approach)

- Motivation next most important factor (but related to English literacy level)

Factors influencing results

– Teaching Time: learning outcomes significantly correlated with the <u>amount of teaching time</u>

– Teacher : learning outcomes significantly correlated with the <u>teacher's level of French</u> and with <u>teacher's level of MFL training</u>.

Motivation over time

- Overall motivation means (attitudes+ self-efficacy)
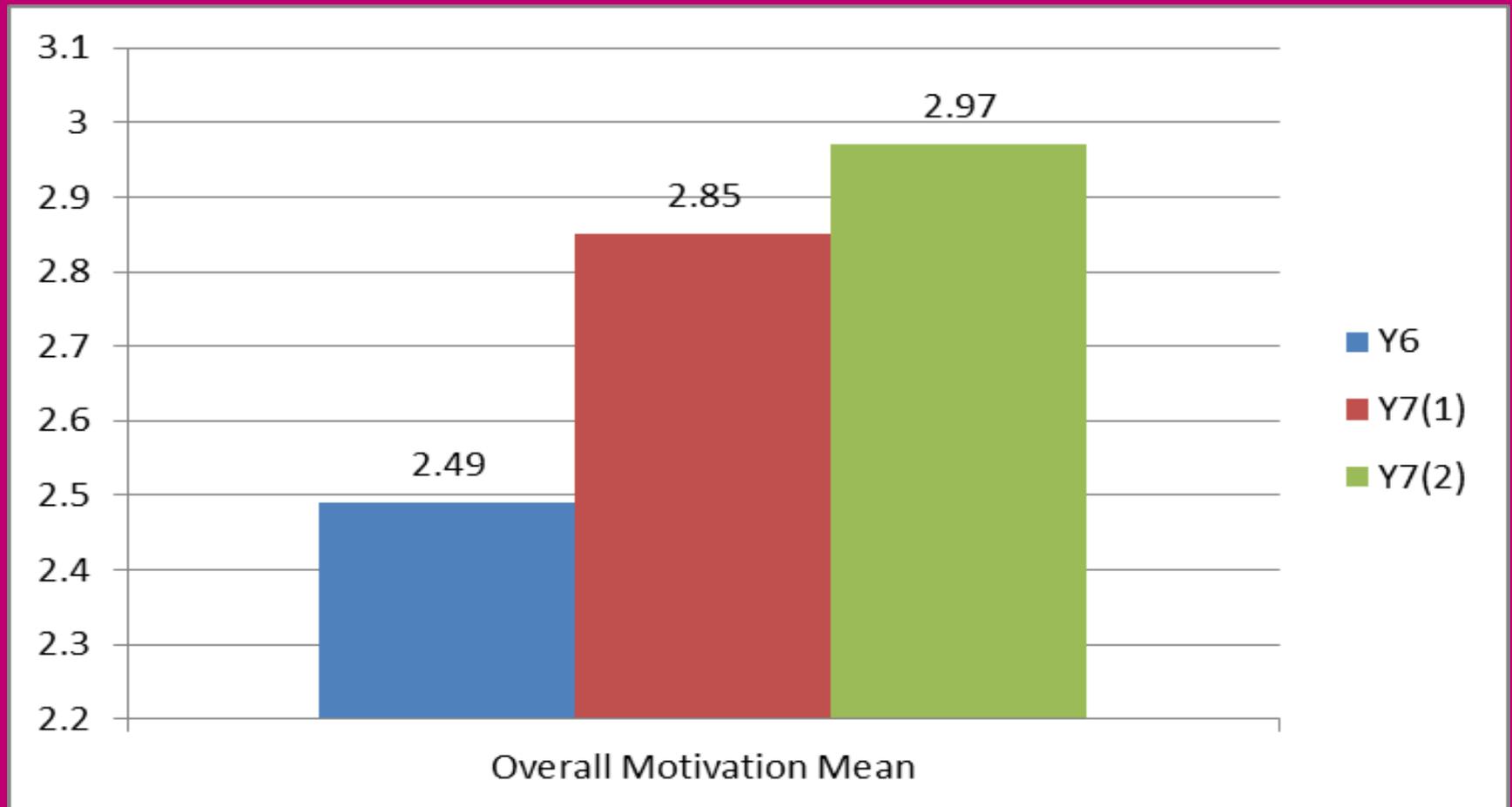
Overall motivation broken down
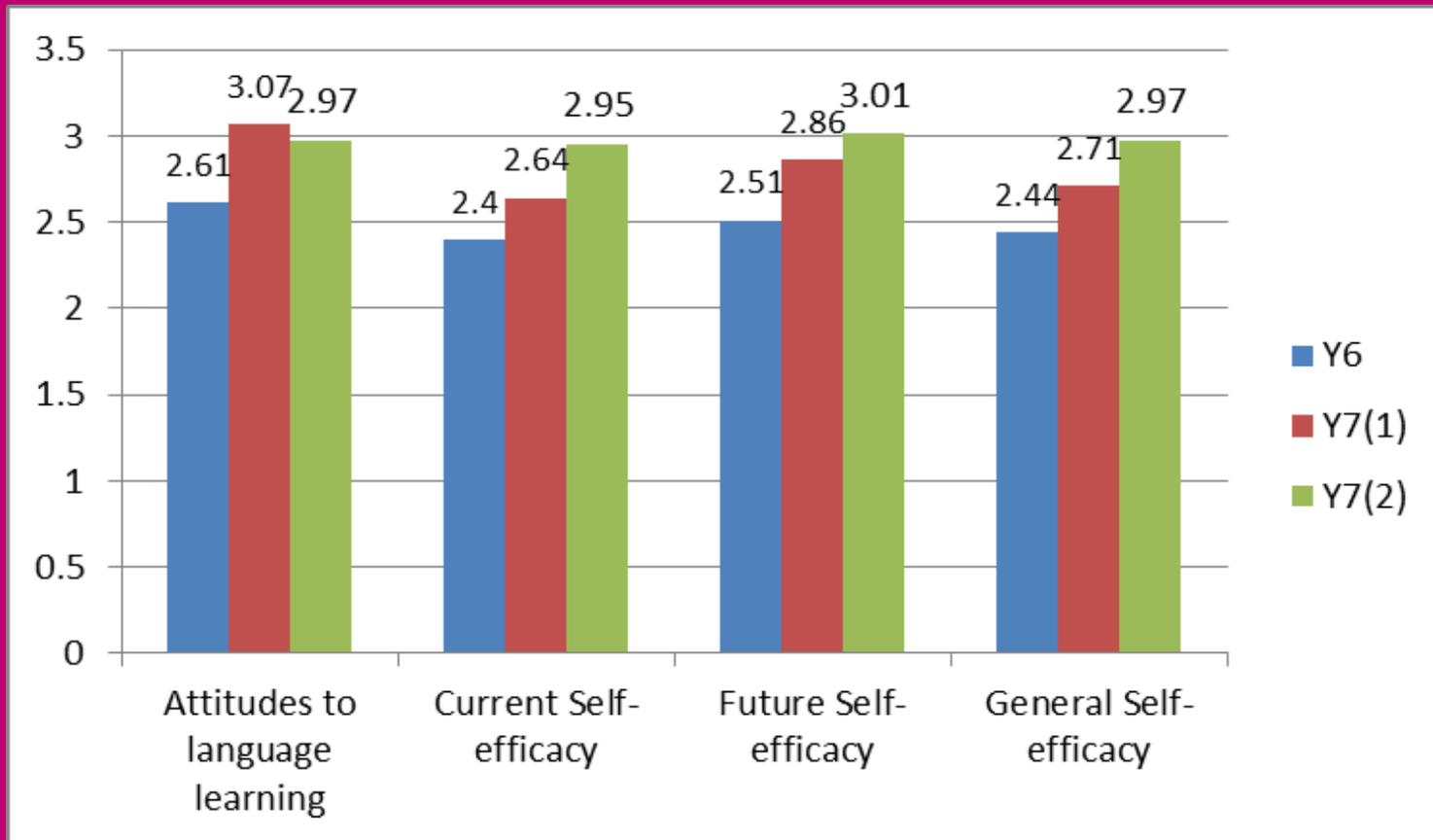
- NB General self-efficacy = current and future self-efficacy combined

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Differences in approach

Scale	Year 6		Year 7(1)		Year 7(2)	
	Literacy	Oracy	Literacy	Oracy	Literacy	Oracy
Overall motivation	2.45	2.55	2.83	2.87	3	2.94
Current Self-Efficacy	2.32	2.52*	2.6	2.7	2.92	2.99
Future Self-Efficacy	2.49	2.54	2.87	2.84	3.08	2.93
General /Total Self-Efficacy	2.38	2.53	2.69	2.74	2.98	2.97
Attitudes to language learning	2.61	2.6	3.06	3.08	3.06	2.88

Motivation - * - compared with previous round

	Year 6 Mean response	Year 7(1) Mean response	Year 7(2) Mean Response
Enjoyed French lessons?	2.3	2.94*	2.87*
Looking forward to future French learning	2.24	3.13*	3.06
Will do well in coming year	2.36	2.96*	3.03

Self-efficacy

	Year 6 Mean response	Year 7(1) Mean response	Year 7(2) Mean Response
Sing songs	2.74	2.49*	2.47
Describe self orally	2.53	2.73*	3.27*
Read a short passage	2.09	2.38*	2.96*

Self-efficacy

	Year 6 Mean response	Year 7(1) Mean response	Year 7(2) Mean Response
Write sentences	2.28	2.68*	3.31*
Understand teacher	2.33	2.74*	2.95
Spell	2.34	2.8*	2.86

Self-efficacy

	Year 6 **Mean response**	Year 7(1) **Mean response**	Year 7(2) **Mean Response**
Word order	2.43	2.73*	2.95*
Gender	2.45	2.59*	2.86*

Attitudes: Learning French…

	Year 6 Mean response	Year 7(1) Mean response	Year 7(2) Mean Response
Is important	2.95	3.09*	2.99
Is fun	2.49	3.03*	2.93*
Will help get a good job	2.33	2.75*	2.63
Will help for travel abroad	3.41	3.55	3.55

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Teacher factors and motivation

In Year 6, overall motivation positively related to:

➢Teaching Time

➢Teacher's level of French

➢But not to Teacher's Training

By start of Year 7, positive correlations persisted for:

➢Teacher's level of French

Likes…(most frequently mentioned items)

Year 6	Year 7 (1)
Learning/specific topics (84)	Learning/specific topics (42)
Games/fun (68)	Progress (27)
Songs (45)	Teacher (25)
Creativity (34)	Games (22)
Cultural aspects (25)	Fun (16)
Technology (22)	Speaking (14)
Writing (purpose) (14)	Interaction (11)

Dislikes….

Year 6	Year 7
Nothing (49)	Nothing (62)
Lack of variety (41)	Writing (19)
Difficulty (33)	Revision (17)
Writing (30)	Difficulty (14)
Lack of progress (20)	Class factors (7)
Songs (16)	Tests (6)
Speaking (13) Reading (12)	Teacher TL (5) Other teacher factors (5)

Do you prefer how you learn French at secondary school or how you learnt French at primary school?

- 11% preferred Primary French
- 89% preferred Secondary French
- Main reasons for preferring Secondary:
- ➢ Learn more/challenge (46)
- ➢ Topics (44)
- ➢ More interesting/fun (27)
- ➢ Games (14)
- ➢ Group work (13)

Would like to change about Secondary French:

Most frequently mentioned -

- More fun/games (17)

- More group work (10)

- More interaction (10)

Conclusions

- Progress and increased motivation across transition phase – contrary to previous research findings

- Progress is statistically significant but small– important from an assessment perspective

- Importance of individual factors + teaching time/teacher training/teacher French

- No one approach clearly better than the other, but maybe nature of literacy tasks used?

- Possibility that literacy approach may help lower literacy learners?

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Conclusions

- Sense of progress important for motivation

- Sense of stagnation and repetition a potential problem at primary level

- Sense of difficulty, however, equally problematic

- Secondary **may** give greater sense of making progress, but attitudes?

- Need for continuing enjoyment and interaction