Professional Development of Italian Primary School Teachers who Teach English.
What Prospects after B1 Certification?

Sviluppo professionale dei docenti della scuola primaria italiana che insegnano l'inglese. Quali prospettive dopo il B1?

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of the training of Italian teachers who teach English in primary school. The development of the teaching of foreign languages, including English, in Italy is briefly illustrated from the historical and regulatory points of view together with the state-of-the-art in the field of teacher professional development in Europe. Then, the Keep Up Your English (KUYE) course, which is still in progress, is presented. The course has been activated to satisfy the demand for further linguistic and methodological training expressed by some Italian primary school teachers already in possession of B1 level certification (CEFR) and, therefore, having title to teach English in their classes according to the current legislation. Then, a research carried out within the KUYE course to understand the teachers' motivations and learning needs is presented. The discussion of the data also focuses on concerns, perceptions, awareness and learning strategies which can be activated by using ICT. The research, which will be completed once the course is over, highlights a critical issue, already known, in the institutional training of this category of teachers, i.e. that of lack of its continuity and, at the same time, offers some suggestions for overcoming this.

L'articolo affronta la questione della formazione dei docenti italiani che insegnano l'inglese nella scuola primaria. Si illustra brevemente lo sviluppo storico-normativo dell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere e dell'inglese in Italia nonché lo stato dell'arte nel campo dello sviluppo professionale dei docenti in ambito europeo. Quindi, viene presento il corso Keep Up Your English (KUYE), tutt'ora in fase di svolgimento, volto a soddisfare la domanda di ulteriore formazione linguistica e metodologica espressa da alcune docenti italiane della scuola primaria già in possesso della certificazione di livello B1 (QCER) e, pertanto, già in possesso del titolo necessario per insegnare l'inglese nelle loro classi secondo la normativa vigente. Nell'ambito del corso KUYE, è stata condotta una ricerca con lo scopo di capire le motivazioni e i bisogni formativi manifestati dalle insegnanti. La discussione dei dati mette anche a fuoco preoccupazioni, percezioni, consapevolezze e strategie di apprendimento attivabili attraverso l'uso delle TIC. L'indagine in

svolgimento, che verrà completata a conclusione del corso, fa emergere una criticità, peraltro già nota, nel processo di formazione istituzionale di questa categoria di docenti, cioè la mancanza della sua continuità, e offre, contestualmente, spunti per il suo superamento in future edizioni di corsi di formazione istituzionali rivolti a docenti in servizio che insegnano l'inglese nella scuola primaria.

There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book,
pass an examination and finish with education.
The whole of life, from the moment you are born
till the moment you die is a process of learning.
Learning has no end and that is the
timeless quality of learning.
(Jiddu Krishnamurti[1])

La mancanza di cura è assenza di valore.
(Hito Steyerl[2])

1. Teaching English in Italian Primary Schools: a Brief Normative Reconstruction

Addressing the theme of training primary school teachers who teach English in Italy means dealing with learning and teaching a specific key competence for lifelong learning, namely multilingual competence (Council of the European Union *Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* of 22 May 2018). As a matter of fact, teachers who teach English now in Italian primary schools have had to face, in recent years, a dedicated training before becoming English teachers owing to their lack of the necessary qualifications. This extension of their educational role dates back to 2005 when a new training project for primary school

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1 Jiddu Krishnamurti was a stateless philosopher of Indian origin (1895-1986). Quotation from: Krishnamurti, J. (2003). *Krishnamurti on Education*. Bramdean (Hampshire): Krishnamurti Foundation Trust Ltd, p. 57.
2 Hito Steyerl is an artist and theorist of contemporary German art. She is of Japanese origin (1966-). Quotation from: Pappalardo, D. (2018, November 2). Hito Steyerl. "Ai regimi l'arte deve dire no". *la Repubblica*, p. 32. «Lack of care is lack of value» (our translation).

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teachers who intended to teach English to their pupils was started (*Comunicazione di servizio* 1446/2005). Since foreign language teaching in Italian primary schools took place over several decades and in different ways, it is useful to give an account of how this happened.

The first experiments of teaching English in primary schools – among other foreign languages – date back to 1975-76 when the Insegnamento Lingue Straniere nella Scuola Elementare Project (ILSSE)[3] started. The project lasted for a decade. Teachers had to cope with two needs: creating teaching materials specifically aimed at young pupils — not yet on the market — and defining the foreign language teacher's profile in terms of linguistic and methodological skills.

To encourage experimentation in foreign language teaching in primary school, another important project, *Ianua Linguarum*, was set about in 1985. It was organized and directed by Giovanni Freddi, the first Italian university professor to cover the position of foreign language teaching methodology, and a scholar who believed in the value of early foreign language learning. Freddi cared about language teachers' education: he wanted to

> overcome the Renaissance and then Gentile's idea of the teacher as a mind shaper, a civil and moral guide, an artist and a craftsman of education that pursues an ideal project, in order to make him/her a professional trained *ad hoc* on the scientific basis of language teaching, open to the use of technology, expert in the world, or at least in Europe, in which he/she teaches future citizens how to move and communicate. (Balboni 2012, p. 246, our translation)

The pilot projects for early language teaching were institutionalized by the Falcucci Reform (Presidential Decree 104/1985). This turning point led to the administrative act that, in 1991, introduced the compulsory teaching of a Community language (English, French, German or Spanish) from second class onwards for three hours a week (Ministerial Decree 28/06/1991). On request and on the basis of finalized projects, funds and/or staff were guaranteed for the implementation of teaching from the first class and even in nursery school. Teacher selection procedures were adjusted accordingly by providing optional assessment of one or more foreign languages (Leg. Decree 297/1994, 400, 1-12). In this context most significant European in-service professional development projects that invested the overwhelming majority of foreign language teachers — the so called *Progetto Speciale Lingue Straniere* (1976-1995) and *Progetto 2000* — were implemented. Since then, the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) indications have been widely adopted in Italy (MPI - Agenzia Scuola 2007, p. 5).

The compulsory teaching of one of the four Community languages introduced in 1991 changed into the teaching of English (Leg. Decree 59/2004). However, the maintenance of other languages in the classes where they had already been taught was guaranteed. In the first phase, English was taught by the so-called *specialists* — i.e. primary school teachers holding a qualification in foreign languages — who

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3   Primary school has had this name since 2003 when "scuola elementare" was changed into "scuola primaria" (Law 53/2003, art. 2).

4   This situation was adopted as an exceptional solution because the aim of the law was another since the teaching of the foreign language, according to the Ministerial Decree of 28/06/1991 (art. 4), had to be entrusted to a specialized primary school teacher in possession of specific competences and member of the organizational and didactic module as prescribed by Law 148/90, art. 5 (Gandola

taught only English in a number of classes[4]. Following Presidential Decree 81/2009, aimed at reorganizing schools and human resources (article 10, subsection 5), the teaching of English had to be provided by *specialized* teachers, i.e. generalist teachers who were trained to teach English to their classes. Only in cases of personnel shortage and, however, only up to the 2011-2012 school year, was it possible to turn to *specialists* who were not the class teacher. For generalist teachers — mostly without language qualifications — a three-year blended training was organized (*Comunicazione di servizio* 1446/2005) to develop methodological competences (40 hours) and get the CEFR B1 certification (340 hours) — considered as the minimum level of competence to be able to teach English in primary school.

Undertaking a long-term training of staff lacking the necessary requirements seemed to be, above all and paradoxically, a response to the need to contain public expenditure envisaged by the Gelmini reform. In the same way, some years before, the creation of the so-called didactic module (more than one teacher teaches a class or the classes the module refers to, as established by Law 148/1990) was considered by some authors as an institutional solution to cope with birth decline in late 1980s (Cicenia 2012, p. 88). Also in this case it was thought that the financial reason had prevailed over the educational one, almost a counterpoint to the end of the 1980s reform (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, from another point of view, the value of the "module" was underpinned as an effective organization to improve school education, particularly in primary school (Spinelli 2009). Looking at the matter from the same perspective, Titone (1990) had anticipated the need to devise specific professional education for primary school teachers aimed at equipping them with the foreign language skills and the methodological competences necessary to teach young learners.

Investing in early foreign language learning has represented, since the CEFR elaboration (even earlier), one of the qualifying points of European policies aimed at raising the communicative competence level of the citizens belonging to the Member States of the Union. As Dawes (2012, p. 11) points out, to meet this expectation Italy chose to face something extraordinary and demanding:

> The decision to entrust the teaching to primary school generalists has posed an enormous challenge: that of training primary practitioners, many of whom possess very little foreign language background, to teach English.

2. Theoretical Background for Teacher Professional Development

The field of primary school English teacher training has not been thoroughly investigated yet (Wilden & Porsch 2017) and requires greater involvement and more appropriate interventions aimed at all teachers working in the European context (Enever 2014; Strakovà 2014). Among those who are studying this field, there is a widespread belief that more attention should be paid to continuous professional development (Bokdam *et al*. 2014; Pang & Wray 2017) and, so, shift the balance from pre-service to in-service training to correct an evident asymmetry (Terhart 2014, in Wilden & Porsch 2017, p. 10) and to build on the recursiveness of training

2009). Actually, in the 90s, the teachers selected and trained through various projects could be *specialists* or *specialized* (generalist teachers trained to teach English to their classes). Different situations could be found within the same school.

rather than on its uniqueness, a pre-service training feature. This hoped-for shift, which can be true for contexts where pre-service teachers have a specific training to teach English, is an issue to be considered in Italy even if pre-service training is not adequate and not uniform yet[5]. As a matter of fact, Pang and Wray (2017, p. 65), referring to Hattie (2009), reflect on how vital it is to pay more attention to CPD (Continuing Professional Development), because «concentrating on teachers' CPD is the most effective way to make a difference to pupils' learning outcomes as [teachers'] previous attainment cannot be changed».

Giving more emphasis to continuous education means making more of non-formal and informal compared to formal training. Of course, in-service teachers can attend formal courses but the learning opportunities offered by non-formal and informal contexts are much more frequent and much more focused on individual needs and, to use Werquin's words, make it possible «to deal effectively with problems that are currently poorly handled» by formal education (2010, p. 16). This implies reconsidering the value of individual activities such as reading, observing colleagues, collaborating with online networks. These activities can be carried out during internship but also in contexts different from university or school (Wilden & Porsch 2017). In support of this, Wilden and Porsch, reporting Lieberman's thought (1996), argue that

> Formal education and training only contributes a small proportion to teachers' learning. Teachers need to be educated in and out of the work place as both are crucial in their CPD and this strongly suggests a learner-focused perspective as being more crucial than a training-focused perspective in planning and managing CPD for teachers. (p. 68)

Consequently, those who are in charge of designing training courses should also aim at developing a specific competence, namely being able to take advantage of the opportunities a teacher can be offered outside formal contexts (cf. «Personal, social and learning to learn competence», *Council of the European Union Recommendation* of 22 May 2018, C 189/10). We are also referring to the construct of self-directed learning through reciprocity (Richieri, 2011), that kind of education which results from the encounter with the other, and through the ability to conceive plurality as the basic foundation of one's learning. The relationship with the other, if based on exchange, appears to be an interdependence relationship aimed at the subject's autonomy — the ultimate goal of education — and involves progressive and continuous development of the self in terms of personal resources that act on the inclusion of individuals and that enhance openness toward the others. With these premises, therefore, we can share the view of Bandini *et al*. (2015) who envision a teacher who can become the architect of his/her professionalism, able to promote and self-regulate his/her learning process indi-

5   All Italian teachers, included primary school teachers, should have a B2 level in English (Ministerial Decree 249/2010, art. 3, subsection 4a). The competition which is going to be held in a few months to recruit new primary school teachers will assess a B2 level in English (Bussetti conferma: bandi concorsi in estate. PAS prossima riunione, *OrizzonteScuola.it*, 07/06/2019, https://www.orizzonte-scuola.it/bussetti-conferma-bandi-concorsi-in-estate-pas-prossima-riunione-martedi-11-giugno/). Regrettably, the assessment of the necessary language skills and methodological competences will take place exclusively during the oral interview. As far as primary school teaching staff with a B1 level in English is concerned, nothing seems to have been designed to upgrade their language competence in compliance with the above-mentioned Ministerial Decree 249/2010.

vidually and through communities and networks of practice.

Therefore, training courses should focus not only on the areas which refer to the academic subject but also on those associated to personal resources which only sometimes are embedded in personality traits but which can be developed in everyone. They facilitate mutual exchange and for this reason every teacher should be familiar with them: the acknowledgement of the others' values, the use of self-criticism, the prediction of the others' reactions, the request of opinions different from one's own, the use of softening expressions[6] while communicating, just to name a few.

Another important issue is related to *attitudinal barriers*, e.g. teachers' lack of motivation when they decide whether or not to participate in CPD initiatives (Bokdam *et al.*, 2014). Among the motivations that lead teachers to look for improvement opportunities, professional needs strongly linked to daily practice at school can be included. Pang and Wray (2017), sharing Pedder and Opfer's thoughts (2013) as well as those of Day and Leitch's (2007), feature teaching resources to be used in class: «One of the problems lies in CPD experiences which are disconnected from the classroom. […] CPD should include opportunities for teachers to focus on subject matter that includes hands-on practice to be integrated into their daily teaching». Other constraints may severely limit willingness to undertake in-service training, these include logistical and organizational aspects. The consideration of teachers' preferences in terms of learning environment must be added: «some teachers prefer [workshop style sessions] as compared to a lecture style session with input» (Pang & Wray 2017, p. 73). Considering their preferences means being aware of how much emotions can affect learners' attitude (Matthews *et al.* 2012), whether they are young students or adults. Preferences can also be related to trainers themselves, their approach adopted in previous training contexts and their teaching competences. This brings about considerations that concern also trainer training itself and the enhancement of trainer competences (Pang & Wray 2017). This theme, which does not fall within the scope of this contribution, deserves further study, also in light of the Council of the European Union *Recommendation* of 22 May 2018 which can give trainers food for thought in the setting up of learning environments suited to the purpose of in-service teacher training.

Up to this point we have reconstructed the Italian regulations for teaching foreign languages, including English, in primary school and we have outlined the theoretical background related to teacher education of Italian. In the following paragraph the issues to investigate, the research hypotheses, the group of the teachers involved, and the features of the *KUYE* course are going to be illustrated.

3. The Research: Issues to Investigate, Hypotheses, Teachers involved, and the KUYE Course Features

We have been involved in institutional programmes concerning the development of communicative and methodological teaching competences for primary school English teachers for ten years, which has implied teaching groups from 0/A1 to B1

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6   Softening expressions favour empathy and collaboration. They rely on modals, hypothetical periods, impersonal forms, hesitation markers, false beginnings, informal register, impact modifiers (perhaps, somehow ...). Tone of voice, face and body expression also play a role (cf. Richieri 2011, p. 20).

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level (CEFR) since 2008. Upon finishing each course (which normally developed over a three-year period), the issues of autonomous consolidation and development of one's competences were addressed. To facilitate personal responsibility towards the achieved goals, we have always shared online resources, bibliographical references, instructions for activities which can be easily completed autonomously or in collaboration with colleagues in the belief that absence or poor care of one's communicative and methodological competences, painstakingly achieved, lead to their regression. This conviction becomes stronger if the subjects are generalist teachers who, unlike secondary school teachers, are expected to keep up-to-date on multiple fronts and, therefore, have to distribute time and energy to several subjects.

3.1. Issues to investigate

We have never investigated how effective our suggestions at the end of the institutional education of these teachers have proven, neither have we researched their attitude while fulfilling their new role as English language teachers. The conclusion of the ministerial training (*Piano Formazione Lingue* by INDIRE[7]) offered to the second contingent[8] induced us to face the following main questions (and their subsidiary one/s) we have repeatedly asked ourselves for over the years:

Q1.   What is the degree of teachers' awareness related to their skills' vulnerability? (If they are aware, do they implement actions to maintain/develop them? If yes, which ones?)

Q2.   What reasons lead them to seize further training opportunities? (What concerns may keep them from starting new training experiences?)

Q3.   Is direct experience of learning strategies valuable? (Which strategies, developed while training, can teachers profitably teach pupils?)

The issues, therefore, are about care for one's skills (Q1), emotional domain (Q2) and value of experience (Q3).

To investigate these areas, we contacted the teachers who had attended the last two institutional courses we were in charge of and invited them to join the *KUYE* course aimed at strengthening and developing their skills on the basis of our personal intuitions whose reliability we could ascertain while teaching them. The course is included in the educational programmes developed by ANFIS[9].

3.2. Hypotheses

On the basis of our experience as a teacher trainer and considering the theoretical background outlined ahead, we set up *KUYE* in the belief that at least some of the

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7   Istituto Nazionale Documentazione, Innovazione, Ricerca Educativa, http://www.indire.it/-progetto/pfl/.
8   The first contingent was trained from 2005 to 2008 (http://puntoedu.indire.it/corsi/content/-index.php?action=docenti&id_cnt=2938).
9   Associazione Nazionale Formatori Insegnanti Supervisori is a national association of teacher trainers and tutors (http://www.anfis.it/), a qualified subject for teacher training since 2010 and a qualified entity according to Direttiva 170/2016 .

teachers who had obtained the B1 level certification at the end of the previous two institutional courses we were responsible for (2013 and 2017) would join it. We hypothesized they would join it on the ground of their perception of a decline in communicative competence and if the course would have some specific features: restricted number of face-to-face classes per month, activities closely linked to teaching practice, promotion of self-directed and informal education, development of digital competence. We also intended to collect information on the dimensions covered by the questions above (Q1, Q2, Q3).

3.3. Teachers involved

Twenty-one teachers   out of the twenty-six we had reached   joined *KUYE* (all women aged 40-60)[10]. They had joined the INDIRE training project (*Piano Formazione Lingue*) to achieve B1 certificate in 2013 and 2017. The INDIRE training project had been organized according to a blended model: the online resources and activities had aimed at developing communication and methodological skills; in face-to-face training, tutors ensured resource use, activity implementation and face-to-face-virtual classes continuity. *Piano Formazione Lingue* has recently received attention from the Japan Association of College English Teachers[11]. The interest expressed by Japan, a country which, since 2014, has been studying the issue of primary school English teacher training, attests to the value of the INDIRE training project. However, the limited activation of further national courses aimed at consolidating and developing competences for Italian teachers with qualification   albeit included in the 2016/2019 *Piano per la Formazione dei Docenti 2016/2019 La buona Scuola* (Ministerial Decree 797/2016)   suggested the activation of a local course endorsed by ANFIS.

3.4. The KUYE course features

The *KUYE* course intends to:

– strengthen and develop communication skills;
– promote discussion on methodological and educational issues;
– encourage autonomous professional development also through digital tools and resources.

   The *KUYE* format:

– the course provides for 8 face-to-face meetings, the first before the 2017-18 school year closure;
– the course is based on blended learning model (24 hours of face-to-face training and at least 6 hours of online training on Moodle platform);

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10 See Table 1 in § 5.1 for their profiles.
11 Cf. Ishihara & Richieri (2016) where additional activities for speaking/listening skills development (Skype interaction, visit to a contemporary art exhibition) are illustrated.

- face-to-face meetings (3 hours) occur once a month;
- the course includes mandatory and optional activities;
- the fee is covered with *carta del docente*[12];
- a textbook with online expansions and workbook with solutions has been adopted.

We intended to promote summer study and participation to facilitate, at least in the initial period of the course, those teachers who, during the academic year, are in charge of additional duties (collaborator or plexus contact). Plenty of time is devoted to audio-oral activities in face-to-face classes, while forums on the platform support the sense of belonging, and foster writing skills. Monthly face-to-face classes entail active online participation and call for regular attendance. Trainees' different amount of time available and different levels of motivation demand different degrees of commitment. This is being achieved by offering mandatory and optional activities. A textbook with keys has been adopted in order to develop autonomy and self-directed education.

4. Research Method

The research used two surveys undertaken with Google Forms. Through Survey 1 (administered at the beginning of the course), data was collected about teachers' profiles (Table 1 and Table 2). This survey was made mainly of closed questions to investigate the subjects' English teaching education and experience, motivations and awareness of the value of an online platform as a resource. Three open questions investigated the subjects' concerns and possible recommendations addressed to the trainer. This data would help to better tailor the course to teacher needs.

Survey 2 was conducted after the third face-to-face class, namely about halfway through the course. This second survey was made of closed and open questions. It explored teacher awareness in relation to their skills' vulnerability as English teachers, the actions they had implemented to maintain/develop them autonomously, their educational needs, included learning strategies and ICT. This second survey was administered after the third face-to-face class in order to give the teachers enough time to become conscious of the real level of their skills. We intended to collect data on: a)

awareness of the need for continuous practice, b) actions taken autonomously before joining *KUYE*, c) mid-term outcomes, d) learning strategies, and e) methodological principles and difficulties in following them. The data collected through Survey 2 would ascertain the level of the teachers' responsibility towards their CPD (a, b), the benefits already achieved three months after the beginning of the course (c) as well as the areas which needed our utmost attention (d, e). Findings are presented through frequency tables in the following paragraph. Data, mainly qualitative, will be discussed by using descriptive analysis.

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12 It is a 500 euros bonus Italian teachers can use for professional development (Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca, Law 107/2015 (Buona Scuola), art. 1, subsection 121, https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/07/15/15G00122/sg, https://cartadeldocente.istruzione.it/.

5. Results

The results are presented here below by referring to the instruments we made use of to collect data.

5.1. Survey 1

Through Survey 1, data was collected about teachers' profiles (Table 1) including language certification, English language teaching experience, concerns and value attributed to an online platform as a learning resource (closed questions). These data are introduced here since they allowed us to better answer the research questions. As data show, nine teachers out of twenty-one obtained the B1 level certification more than one year before starting *KUYE*. Thirteen out of twenty-one have already had English language teaching experience for a few years (some of them even before the B1 level certification).

Dimensions investigated	Option 1	Option2	No. of Respondents
When B1 certificate was obtained	Before 2016: 9 (42,9%)	After 2016: 12 (57,1%)	21
English language teaching experience in primary school	Yes: 13 (61,9%)	No: 8 (38,1%)	21
When they had this experience	Before B1 level certification: 6	After B1 level certification: 7	13
Length of the experience	Over 5 years: 1 (11,1%)	Less than 5 years: 8 (88,9%)	9
Concerns before starting *KUYE*	Yes: 2 (9,5%) A little: 10 (47,6%)	No: 9 (42,9%)	21
Awareness of the value of online platforms as resources	Yes: 18 (85,7%)	I don't know: 3 (14,3%)	21

Table 1. Teachers' profiles.

As for their concerns at the beginning of *KUYE*, twelve teachers out of twenty-one are worried, at least a little. To deepen this area, an open question – *What are your concerns at the beginning of this new educational experience?* – was envisaged to collect data about the emotional domain. The most frequently reported concerns were connected with lack of time and sense of inadequacy that would lead to lose face before the group.

To further explore teachers' apprehensions, one more open question was asked — *What advice would you give your trainer at the beginning of this new experience?* — which led us to taking decisions concerning the organization of activities. The reported recommendations were about: reinforcement of group relationships, especially after two new trainees had joined, revision of what had been previously learnt, communication skills development, use of examples, demand for stimulating activities.

As to the platform, the majority (eighteen out of twenty-one) think that it is a useful tool since it offers advantages such as remote collaboration, participation according to personal time availability and pace, continuous contact between the group members, traceability and conservation of works. Three respondents seem not to have ever used a platform but no one denies its usefulness.

Table 2 shows the motivations that led the teachers to join *KUYE*. They could choose up to four motivations: consolidation and development of communication skills were the main reasons for seventeen of them, immediately followed by the already established relationship with the trainer (sixteen). Classes schedule (once a month) was also a good reason to choose *KUYE* for six respondents.

Motivations	No. of teachers	No. of Respondents
I want to consolidate communication skills.	17 (81%)	21
I want to develop my communication skills.	17 (81%)	21
I want to train to get B2 certificate.	4 (19%)	21
I want to train with colleagues I know.	4 (19%)	21
I know the teacher.	16 (76,2%)	21
Lessons are scheduled once a month.	6 (28,6%)	21
I want to do activities on the platform when I can.	3 (14,3%)	21
I want to get an attendance certificate issued by a qualified body.	5 (23,8%)	21
Other	0 (0%)	21

Table 2. Motivations to join KUYE (up to 4 choices per respondent). Please note that percentages are not to be added as they refer to different variables.

5.2. Survey 2

The second survey examined the following areas: awareness of the need for continuous practice, actions implemented autonomously before joining *KUYE*, midterm outcomes, learning strategies, and methodological principles and difficulties in following them. The data regarding these areas are presented here below.

5.2.1. Awareness of the need for continuous practice

All teachers are aware of the transience of the acquired communication skills (Table 3). Twelve teachers out of twenty perceive their communication skills in English as weaker now. By contrast, twelve teachers out of twenty think they maintain the same level of methodological competences they possessed upon finishing the INDIRE course. For six teachers, these competences have even strengthened. This perception, investigated through an open question, is based on the positive feedback from pupils who improved while having fun, on their ability to set up lessons different from the ones in textbooks, on the evenness daily teaching can sprout in terms of progressive autonomy and self-regulation. Only two teachers perceive that they are weaker also in this area.

Another finding regards the decision to start *KUYE* before summer. This decision was welcomed by fifteen teachers out of twenty who, by answering an open question, explained that, in this way, they had been encouraged to take over materials and resources in the summer to continue the training autonomously as well as to explore the platform and become familiar with it before the school started. Some teachers had planned their summer holidays abroad which had brought

about some motivation for revision by accessing the online activities in English.

Perceptions	Option 1	Option 2	No. of Respondents
Have you ever posed yourself the question of maintaining the competence level you achieved in English and methodology for teaching English?	Yes: 20 (100%)	No: 0 (0%)	20
From B1 certificate to the beginning of *KUYE*, what do you think happened to your communication skills in English?	They strengthened: 2 (10%) They are at the same level: 6 (30%)	They are weaker now: 12 (60%)	20
From B1 certificate to the beginning of *KUYE*, what do you think happened to your methodological competences?	They strengthened: 6 (30%) They are at the same level: 12 (60%)	They are weaker now: 2 (10%)	20
Was it a good idea to start *KUYE* before summer?	Yes: 15 (75%)	No: 5 (25%)	20

Table 3. Perceptions about one's communicative and methodological competences.

5.2.2. Actions implemented autonomously before joining KUYE

To test autonomy in taking care of the acquired skills, the following closed question was asked: *Before joining KUYE, what did you do to maintain the level of communication skills in English already achieved?* Table 4 presents the initiatives taken by the teachers (they could choose as many options as they wished). What is evident is that the initiatives aimed at systematic consolidation/development of oral interaction do not seem to be very popular, apart from the use of English while spending a short period abroad. However, they did watch films in English, read books or documents in English, maintained contacts with native English-speakers (facebook/e-mail). The less common actions included enrolling in private courses and the original strategy of establishing family rules according to which at certain times only English was spoken. Nobody joined a group of colleagues at school to practice oral communication skills, attended university courses or kept a journal in English.

The same open question was asked to identify the actions implemented autonomously before joining *KUYE* to strengthen/develop methodological competences.

Actions	No. of teachers	No. of Respondents
I attended course(s) privately.	3 (15%)	20
I attended university course(s).	0 (0%)	20
I maintained contacts with native English-speakers (facebook/e-mail).	7 (35%)	20
I stayed in an English-speaking country for over a week.	1 (5%)	20
I travelled to non-English speaking countries using English to communicate.	6 (30%)	20
I attended meetings at school to speak only English.	0 (0%)	20
I read books or documents in English.	9 (45%)	20
I watched films in English.	11 (55%)	20

I kept a journal in English.	0 (0%)	20
I established family rules according to which at times only English was spoken.	1 (5%)	20
Other	0 (0%)	20

Table 4. Actions implemented autonomously before joining KUYE to maintain communication skills in English (unlimited choice number). Please note that percentages are not to be added since they refer to different variables.

The teachers could choose as many options as they wished. As shown in Table 5, the most frequently actions include: careful reading of the teacher guide which goes with the adopted textbook (thirteen respondents out of twenty included this action in the ones they implemented), collaboration with experienced colleagues (eleven out of twenty), reading online documents (nine out of twenty), self-directed reflection (eight out of twenty), viewing experts' lessons on *Youtube* (six out of twenty).

Actions	No. of teachers	No. of Respondents
I asked experienced colleagues for advice.	11 (55%)	20
I read online brochures/articles.	9 (45%)	20
I viewed experts' lessons on *Youtube*.	6 (30%)	20
I reflected to apply what I had learned while doing INDIRE training.	8 (40%)	20
I examined the teacher guide which goes with textbook.	13 (65%)	20
Other	0 (0%)	20

Table 5. Actions implemented autonomously before joining KUYE to maintain English teaching competences (unlimited choice number). Please note that percentages are not to be added since they refer to different variables.

5.2.3. Mid-term outcomes

Halfway through *KUYE*, the outcomes perceived as already achieved were investigated to be able to modify, if necessary, any course features (Table 6). The teachers could choose as many options as they wished. The distinction between consolidation and expansion/development (outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8) allowed us to collect data to understand teachers' perceptions and, consequently, tailor – as far as possible – the online activities by diversifying them by difficulty and time required, and by including optional activities to stimulate the most motivated teachers to work harder. Vocabulary and grammar review, and vocabulary expansion are the outcomes perceived as already achieved by sixteen and fifteen respondents respectively. Another area many teachers

Mid-term outcomes	No. of teachers	No. of Respondents
Vocabulary and grammar review	16 (80%)	20
Communication skills reinforcement	11 (55%)	20
Vocabulary expansion	15 (75%)	20
4. Communication skills development	10 (50%)	20

5.	Materials preparation	6 (30%)	20
6.	Peer discussion on pedagogical issues in English	4 (20%)	20
7.	Use of digital tools/resources	6 (30%)	20
8.	Further development in the use of digital tools/resources	5 (25%)	20
9.	Promotion of group interaction	5 (25%)	20
10.	Support for self-directed training	9 (45%)	20
11.	Other	0 (0%)	20

Table 6. Mid-term outcomes according to teachers' perceptions after 3 months (unlimited choice number. Please note that percentages are not to be added since they refer to different variables.

perceive as successfully achieved is the support to self-directed training (this is true for 9 respondents out of twenty). Conversely, more attention should be paid to setting up materials to be used at school. Peer discussion in English on pedagogical topics prompted in online forums seems to languish. This is presumably due to linguistic barriers which will be partially overcome in the second part of the course by presenting keywords and formulas to facilitate exchange of opinions. The promotion of interaction between teachers, including those who joined the group at the beginning of this course, is still an unanswered issue.

5.2.4. Learning strategies

Survey 2, by investigating strategies supporting communicative activities, made us understand whether the metalinguistic reflection carried out in English in class in some iconic circumstances produces awareness and new learning useful to one's professional development. Furthermore, we decided to focus on the transfer of these strategies to pupils by asking the teachers which of the strategies learned while doing *KUYE* they would teach in class after having experienced them as effective. We explored the strategies (Table 7) illustrated by Mariani (2016, p. 301) since they are representative of the actions implemented by a learner to make learning easier, faster, pleasant, self-directed, effective and transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990, p. 8, in Mariani 2016, p. 300). Data are divided into: Strategies implemented during *KUYE* (A), Strategies learnt while doing *KUYE* (B), and Strategies which will be taught to students (C).

Data show that some strategies have long been acquired by a number of teachers (strategies 8, 2, 7, 1, 3), e.g., 16 teachers out of twenty are familiar with the use of online dictionaries. Some strategies have been developed during *KUYE* (strategies 2, 5, 3, 4, 7), e.g., seven teachers out of twenty have learnt to watch a video or listen to tracks several times always to understand something different. A lot of the strategies (2, 5, 1, 7) will be taught to pupils having experienced their effectiveness, e.g., thirteen teachers will teach their pupils to understand oral texts by listening to them several times in order to always understand something different.

Strategies	A	B	C	No. of Respondents
Ask teacher for better explanation	13 (65%)	1 (5%)	11 (55%)	20

	A	B	C	
Watch a video/listen to tracks several times always to understand something different	15 (75%)	7 (35%)	13 (65%)	20
Keep conversation open by showing interest and asking questions	10 (50%)	5 (25%)	6 (30%)	20
Make notes to remember the order of the topics while speaking or make a list of the points to be developed in a written text	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	5 (25%)	20
Check that the person you are talking to has understood what has just been said	7 (35%)	7 (35%)	12 (60%)	20
Identify the right moment to interrupt the interlocutor and signal you want to speak	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	20
Use synonyms when you do not know/remember words	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	11 (55%)	20
Consult online dictionaries to check terms you want to use in conversation or written texts	16 (80%)	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	20
Write keywords next to paragraphs while reading	8 (40%)	3 (15%)	9 (45%)	20
Use gestures/drawings to make you understood	6 (30%)	1 (5%)	8 (40%)	20
Other	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20

Table 7. Strategies to support communicative activities -
A: Number of choices for strategies implemented during KUYE - B: Number of choices for strategies learned while doing KUYE - C: Number of choices for strategies which will be taught to students (unlimited choice number). Please note that percentages are not to be added since they refer to different variables.

5.2.5. Methodological principles and difficulties in following them

The last explored dimension through a closed question was teachers' difficulty in keeping to their methodological principles (Table 8). We explored this dimension to understand how we could help them in making sense of their professional convictions. The principles concerning the use of English and ICT in class are the ones the teachers respect with greater difficulty (see principles 12, 6 and 11; this is true for eight, seven and five teachers respectively). The causes, investigated through an open question, include: lack of self-confidence in the use of English, limited competence in the use of technology, a lack of availability of technological instrumentations at school which, where they exist, are mostly obsolete. When asked, through an open question, to hypothesize solutions, teachers show they are aware of European projects and collaborations between schools in different countries that could motivate the use of English as *Lingua Franca* by teachers and students (e.g. e-twinning). Other solutions include: collaboration with colleagues who mastered technological skills, the participation – even if occasional – of native English-speakers in lessons, the organization of theatrical events in English, the use of songs in English supported by videos/images, the use of English with gestures. As to limited technological school equipment, while being aware that greater economic resources would allow institutions to acquire more sophisticated and suitable devices in sufficient numbers to satisfy real needs, teachers also report solutions which, thanks to a better school organization, could be easily adopted (e.g. scheduled access to multimedia classrooms, better lesson planning).

Principles*	A	B	No. of Respondents
1. The lessons in which the teacher speaks and the students listen are ineffective.	3 (15%)	0 (0%)	20
Lessons should include activities *in plenum*, for groups and pairs.	13 (65%)	1 (5%)	20
3. Lessons should include reading and ICT activities.	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	20
4. Lessons should be dynamic and include listening and speaking activities.	18 (90%)	2 (10%)	20
5. Lessons should include role-play activities and real-life situations.	12 (60%)	2 (10%)	20
6. Students should have opportunities to experiment with English.	14 (70%)	7 (35%)	20
7. Resources should include *realia*, magazines, educational games, ICT activities.	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	20
8. There are many ways to organize effective lessons.	4 (20%)	0 (0%)	20
9. Lessons should have CLIL content.	8 (40%)	2 (10%)	20
10. Parents should have the chance to collaborate in organizing lessons.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20
11. ICT should be used during lessons.	13 (65%)	5 (25%)	20
12. English should be the language to communicate in class.	11 (55%)	8 (40%)	20
13. The teacher is a guide.	6 (30%)	0 (0%)	20

Table 8. Methodological principles -
A: Number of choices for principles teachers believe in (up to 6 choices) -
B: Number of choices for principles teachers have difficulty to comply with (up to 6 choices).
Please note that percentages are not to be added since they refer to different variables. *Principles inspired by Borg et al. (2014, p. 19).

6. Discussion and Examples of Activities

The discussion below is organized according to the research questions in paragraph 3.1. Moreover, we will illustrate some activities offered in *KUYE* aimed at satisfying trainees' expectations and needs. Some activities were designed while planning *KUYE*, others were created while teaching *KUYE* on the basis of systematic observations and data collected through Survey 2 in the belief that monitoring training effectiveness – which may lead to unpredicted changes – is a feature of good training.

The data related to Q1 show teachers are aware of the need to care for their skills. This is corroborated by various actions they undertook independently to maintain the skills developed with the INDIRE course. Occasionally, they signed up for private lessons (Table 4) but, despite the numerous initiatives, it seems that speaking skills training is difficult to achieve. Therefore, although meeting once a month proved a good choice, it was necessary to devote time to communication skills in face-to-face classes and encourage speaking between classes by using Whatsapp. The application allows informal involvement in exchanging short vocal messages among groups: narratives of experiences or authentic micro-communications also aimed at organizing events.

If most teachers feel they have weak communicative competences, this does not happen with their teaching competences and the actions taken independently to consolidate and develop them, including asking experienced colleagues for advice and making the most of the materials which go with textbooks, are perceived as effective (Table 5). Some teachers' reflections — expressed while answering an open question aimed at investigating the reason of their satisfaction about their methodological competences — deserve consideration since they relate professional development to English teaching assignment:

– I taught English to my students, therefore I had to prepare materials, search for activities and songs on the web, look for ideas, invent strategies to make lessons appealing.
– I continued to teach English to my pupils, so I constantly developed my skills.

These reflections show that too much time between obtaining the qualification to teach English and the assignment of the teaching itself plays against teaching competences. This is due to the missing stimulus generated by the need to organize daily activities and search for support in documentary, technological and human resources. Therefore, we recommended websites and blogs that allow interaction with teachers from different countries on pedagogical topics and, requiring the use of English, also support its consolidation.

The data related to Q2 show the most widespread motivations: the desire to consolidate/develop the already acquired skills and the value assigned to the trainer's *modus operandi*. As to the first motivation, the decision to collect data about consolidation and development separately proved useful suggesting online compulsory and optional activities (signalled by different icons) with different difficulty levels to meet different training needs. To help teachers find their way on the platform, a self-monitoring resource was devised (Figure 1).

Checklist to monitor your activities – Keep Up Your English 2018

Use this checklist to monitor your activities. Tick what you do and when, and jot down short notes which will be useful at the end of the course when the staff asks you to make comments on the activities. At the end of the course this checklist will be uploaded (pdf version, please) onto the platform by each student-teacher. The ANFIS staff will use the information to improve future editions of the course. Here below you will find the checklist already filled in with the minimum requested activities. You can add as many lines as you need (before and after) if you do more activities than the minimum requested. The minimum requested activities are written in red, the others will be written in black.

Classroom training: 14 May ☐ 10 September ☐ 8 October ☐ 12 November ☐ 10 December ☐ 14 January ☐ 11 February ☐ 11 March ☐

Online activities	√	Date	Comment(s)
A letter to the group (Composition 1)			
Get ready for Halloween (Document 1)			
Get ready for Halloween (Forum 1)			
Manners (Document 2)			
Manners (Composition 2)			
Drawings and poems from Terezin (Document 3)			
Drawings and poems from Terezin (Forum 2)			
10 creative ways to teach English that deliver outstanding results (Document 4)			
Catch-up activities for absent students (as many times as necessary)			
Final survey			

Figure 1. Self-check resource

The second most widespread motivation is connected to the trainer's reputation and the teachers' previous training experiences. This opens the issue of

trainer responsibilities: in addition to generating teachers' motivation to take care of their lifelong learning, trainers should protect motivation by proposing relevant activities and materials, giving constructive feedback, supporting autonomous reflection and collaboration among peers, protecting self-esteem and encouraging a positive self-evaluation (Dörnyei 2007). To support what Dörnyei (2007, p. 729) calls *positive retrospective self-evaluation*, the teachers were asked to prepare their digital portfolio on Padlet and keep it updated. Padlet looks like a virtual board which can accommodate any sort of document and can be shared for comments, this way fostering interaction, mutual help and inclusion[13]. By using it as a mirror, this virtual space makes progress evident and induces positive evaluation of oneself also in terms of use of new digital resources that can be worthwhile at school. This specific activity and the planning of learning units met teachers' needs and, being relevant to their daily work, were appreciated although not included among their motivations to join *KUYE*.

Q3 focuses on learning strategies. Data show communication skills consolidation and development as outcomes in the process of being achieved. We think that this may have happened thanks also to the promotion of reflection and commitment aimed at mastering strategies which make communication between learners easier. Several strategies, in addition to the ones already mastered, have been acquired while doing *KUYE* and the teachers' experience of their effectiveness has produced the determination to develop them in their pupils (Table 7).

Use and improvement of digital tools and resources seem to be still unsatisfactory (Table 6). To make up for this perception and legitimate the use of digital tools and resources, teachers were asked to view (in English and then in Italian) a tutorial on *Youtube* to learn how to use Google Forms and prepare a survey to be conducted among their pupils[14]. By becoming familiar with the tool as interviewers – not only as interviewees[15] – teachers will be able to pass on to their pupils what they have learned and ask them to prepare, in turn, surveys in English to train on asking questions. This is how digital competence and competence-based education can be intertwined.

This assignment was devised after monitoring online activities (Table 6) which seemed to give little attention to ready-made resources to be used in class. This monitoring, which proved decisive in gradually modulating training activities in compliance with teachers' needs, let us also intervene promptly on one of the causes which prevent the fulfillment of teachers' methodological principles, namely the limited competence in the use of ICT (Table 8).

7. Conclusions

Before starting this contribution, which almost took on the appearance of a trainer's logbook, we asked ourselves if writing about a still ongoing experience made any sense. While reflecting, however, we understood that this would be the right way to give voice to processes instead of outcomes, focusing on the control of variables

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13   Here is an example of the digital portfolio: https://padlet.com/michi_serena/qf5nf086resy (link published with the teacher's consent).

14   Cf. one of the teachers' survey: https://goo.gl/forms/3EtZ2kkSYzxzF1zE2 (link published with the teacher's consent).

15   We had collected data on *KUYE* from the teachers using this tool ourselves.

which may surface by monitoring training effectiveness and emerging needs. Continuous monitoring, as a matter of fact, engenders adjustments and improvements that can be implemented *hic et nunc*. Listening to requests, sometimes almost whispered or, even better, eliciting them through targeted questions, is very fruitful for a teacher-researcher who wishes to make the most of her role as a trainer.

This research aimed at understanding motivations and learning needs of Italian primary school teachers who teach English to their classes. Our normative reconstruction clarifies the demanding training Italy set up for practitioners with very little foreign language background so that they would have title to teach English according to the current legislation. This very specific kind of in-service training poses a number of challenges to the trainer. Indeed, the results of this research, although to be completed when *KUYE* is over, confirm that effective in-service training dedicated to primary school teachers who teach English to their classes should have the following features: close link between training and teaching practice, promotion of self-directed and informal education, support for establishing international learning communities, development of digital competence. As far as the teachers' awareness of their skills' vulnerability is concerned (Q1), it can be said that they do realize that their communication skills must be cultivated and they do take action, especially to train and develop reading and listening. As to the methodological domain, they are used to asking experienced colleagues for advice. What they look for in an in-service training course (Q2) is consolidation and development of their communication skills to make up for their decline they do perceive, and a friendly setting to help them overcome anxiety and concerns. Moreover, they do appreciate hands-on practice they can integrate into their daily teaching. An in-service language training course can also cover the learning strategies domain (Q3): our findings suggest that setting up contexts aimed at implementing new learning strategies to support communication skills and also aimed at supporting reflection on their use can lead the trainees to experiment with them at school. Moreover, frequent metacognitive reflection on strategies produces a more general awareness of learning processes which are implemented all the way through school.

So, to sum up, the findings confirm our initial hypothesis concerning the features of an attractive course: a restricted number of face-to-face classes per month, activities closely linked to teaching practice, promotion of self-directed and informal education, development of digital competence. Blended learning has allowed us to schedule only one face-to-face class per month. However, to make up for the few opportunities to carry out communicative activities in person, it was necessary to find other ways of communicating that imply speaking. ICT is extremely useful to integrate communication and digital skills. We resorted to Whatsapp for speaking. Other digital tools (e.g. Google Forms, Padlet) can be successfully integrated into an English language course for primary school teachers in order to improve their digital competences and, consequently, overcome their difficulty in keeping to their methodological principles when they imply wide use of ICT.

The reasons why this small group of teachers joined *KUYE* on a voluntary basis is evidence of their concern for the acquired skills and value assigned to them. Training projects should support teachers' motivations and nurture them by offering opportunities and tools that imply the use of English in a less sporadic and more authentic way, even overcoming formal training models and giving more credit to informal training which is the result of real or virtual workplace relationships. This means shifting the focus from the course itself to the learners, considering their needs and adapting training programmes. It also means devoting more attention to trainers' training. As has already been said, in-service training for

teachers who teach English in primary school is very little investigated. We are conscious of the limited value of this research, but we do hope our perspective as a researcher-teacher trainer as well as the trainees' who are doing *KUYE* may be useful for future in-service development programmes for primary school English teachers. We also hope that — apart from the specific context here discussed — inspiration can be drawn from our reasoning to guide and nurture all teachers' behaviors and beliefs which are a sign of their disposition to learn throughout life.

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