○ HOW DOES *TIME-ON-TASK* AFFECT THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EARLY AND LATE STARTERS OF INDONESIAN IN SCHOOLS?

Michelle Kohler *Research Centre for Languages and Cultures, University of South Australia*
Michelle Kohler is a Research Fellow at the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures, University of South Australia and Lecturer in Languages Education at Flinders University. Michelle's research interests include intercultural language teaching and learning, languages curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and Indonesian language education. She has contributed to a number of nationally significant projects particularly related to intercultural language learning, assessment of student achievement and Indonesian language education in Australian schools.
Michelle.Kohler@unisa.edu.au

In the Australian education context, there are typically two cohorts of language learners at the secondary school level, those who commence their study of the target language early in their primary schooling (early starters), and those who commence their study later, at the beginning of secondary school (late starters). The two groups may have undertaken their language study under quite different program conditions, in particular in relation to "time-on-task"[i]. There is little empirical evidence about the nature of student achievement in languages at the end of primary and in junior secondary and its relationship to time-on-task. This paper compares the achievements of a sample of early and late start students of Indonesian in Australia using score data gathered from common measures of achievement. In addition, a small sample of student written responses are analysed in order to highlight issues related to eliciting and describing student achievement that may not be evident from the quantitative data alone. The findings of the study reveal the nature of achievement by early and late starters of Indonesian in the SAALE study, as well as the complexity of investigating a single variable such as time-on-task in relation to student achievement. The paper concludes by recommending that assessment of student achievement in language learning take into consideration methodologies that may capture more holistically a constellation of variables that impact on students' language learning.

KEY WORDS: Early and late start, duration, Indonesian, achievement

INTRODUCTION

The policies to introduce language learning to a broader number of young learners during the 1980s in Australia, as elsewhere (Pufahl, Rhodes & Christian, 2000), were informed in part by a view that the earlier the start in language learning, the better the proficiency outcomes. These views were based on notions such as the critical period hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967) which posited that second language acquisition progressed more rapidly with an early start.

The idea that more time-on-task at a younger age would yield benefits in students' proficiency and attitudes towards language learning has been supported by various studies (Blondin et al., 1998; Clyne, Jenkins, Chen & Wallner, 1995). However, following several decades of language teaching in primary school contexts in Australia, questions remain about the nature of student achievement in languages and how variables such as time-on-task may contribute to it.

This paper explores the question, 'How does time-on-task affect the achievement of early and late starters of Indonesian in schools?' The terms 'early' and 'late' start are adopted in this paper to refer to school students who commence their study of the target language from the start of primary school i.e. early starters, and those who commence study of the target language from the start of secondary school i.e. late starters.

THE EARLY OR LATE START DEBATE

The terms 'early' and 'late' refer to the age of students on commencement of study of the target language, with early usually referring to commencement in primary school and late to secondary school beginners. Based on studies of second language learning in naturalistic settings (Krashen, Long & Scarcella, 1979) and those in which the target language is the medium of instruction (Collier, 1995; Hakuta, Butler & Witt, 2000) it is commonly accepted that increased duration of language study will yield increased proficiency, that is, that 'early' starters reach higher levels of achievement. However, some scholars (Birdsong, 2005; Cook, 1992) argue that naturalistic models of second language acquisition are not a suitable reference point for judging second language learning where the target language is not the sole medium of instruction (the typical case for language programs in Australia). In second language programs in schools, exposure to the target language may depend on factors such as the nature of the program and teacher proficiency hence producing varied results in learner achievement.

Studies of early and late starters in second language programs have produced differing results. For example, Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen & Hargreaves (1974) undertook a longitudinal study of primary school French students and found that early starters outperformed late starters in some skills i.e. speaking and listening comprehension but not in others. A study of 700 students of French in Australia (Hill et al., 1997) by contrast found that early starters initially performed at higher levels than late starters in each of the macro skills, however this advantage was not maintained beyond the first two years of secondary school. A cross-language study conducted by Brown, Hill and Iwashita (2000) revealed variability of outcomes both across languages and in relation to different skills. While there was evidence that early starters of French and Italian had a significant advantage, there was no such advantage for early starters of Japanese, and a significant disadvantage (in reading and writing but not listening) for Indonesian early starters.

Other studies have explored affective aspects of language learning in describing achievement. In their study of young learners of Spanish in the United States, for example, Dominguez and Pessoa (2005) tested a number of skills as well as students' perceptions of their language learning. They compared two groups of year 6 students, 27 who had studied Spanish from kindergarten and five late start students with only one year of Spanish. Overall, they found that on a series of written and oral tests early starters outperformed late starters, in pronunciation, morphology and syntax, but that no significant differences were found on reading tests. In addition, the early start students showed a high degree of confidence in oral and literacy skills and the use of more complex language structures in writing.

Given the varied findings on the early or late start question, recent work has called for greater rigor surrounding the research methodology and sensitivity to contextual variables in interpreting research findings (Munoz, 2008). For example, given the inconsistent findings in their study, Dominguez and Pessoa (2005) indicate their intention to explore the possible impact of test familiarity and students' sense of control of the test items on performance. The authors argue for the need to value other aspects of learning such as student disposition. In her study of continuity of language learning between primary and secondary school Indonesian programs, Hill (2009) suggests the closing of the achievement gap between early and late starters in the middle school years may be due to the increased efficiency of learning among late starters on the one hand and, on the other to the 'stalling' of early starters' knowledge due to teachers' failure to build on their prior knowledge. Furthermore, she suggests that the motivation of early starters may be affected negatively by limited recognition of their prior learning in the transition to the secondary school where the culture of assessment is markedly different to that of primary. Such studies indicate that while time-on-task is a factor in determining the nature and extent of learning, findings must be interpreted in light of the quality of instruction offered to learners and also the aspects of performance that are assessed.

INDONESIAN AND THE AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING CONTEXT

Indonesian has over a fifty year history as a language taught in Australian schools. In the early stages, it was taught in a small number of secondary schools and universities (Read & Reeve, 2010). As a result of a policy orientation during the 1990s to increase Australia's engagement with Asia, Indonesian experienced a rapid expansion of programs and student participation (Kohler & Mahnken, 2010; Slaughter, 2009). The stated goal of the National Asian Languages and Studies of Asia in Schools (NALSAS) included increasing the numbers of students studying Asian languages including Indonesian as one of the four priority languages (MCEETYA, 1994). The major increase in student participation occurred in the primary school sector. The number of secondary programs increased to a lesser degree and hence there are limited opportunities for students to continue to study Indonesian from primary to secondary school. Where students do continue with Indonesian into secondary school, they are typically combined with beginning learners of Indonesian. In terms of student achievement, little is

known about the nature of their Indonesian language learning and there is little to no differentiation of the curriculum and teaching and learning for the two groups.

The major entry point for the majority of students of Indonesian is the first year of primary school with a further entry point at the beginning of junior secondary school. The main exit point for students is at the end of primary, either in Year 6 (in most states and territories) or in Year 7 (e.g. South Australia). The second entry point is at the commencement of secondary schooling, which is Year 7 for the majority of students and Year 8 in some states. At this major transition point students may or may not continue, either through choice or lack of access, in the same language studied in primary school. While there is no data available as to the actual numbers of students who continue to study the same language from primary to secondary school, anecdotally there is limited continuity in the same language between levels of schooling. For those who do continue, there is a question as to how their prior learning is built on in the secondary language program or whether or not students commencing in the study of the specific language can progress to the same level within a short period of more intensive exposure. The conditions between primary and secondary language programs vary substantially with programs in primary ranging from 35-150 minutes per week with most at the lower end of 35-60 minutes, while secondary programs also vary but typically offer 150 minute lessons per week (Liddicoat et al., 2008 [2007]). Secondary programs are, therefore, of greater duration and frequency than primary programs in the main. Thus, among students studying Indonesian in secondary school, there is likely to be a range of time spent studying the language both between those entering at junior secondary, and for those who have continued from primary but who have experienced varied program conditions and 'time-on-task'. To date however there is little evidence as to the nature of their learning under these different program conditions.

THE STUDY

As noted in Elder, Kim and Knoch (this issue), the Student Achievement in Asian Languages Education (SAALE) project assessed students across a range of primary and secondary schools to determine their achievements in language learning in relation to both language background and 'time-on-task'. It is recognised that these two variables are not easily disentangled given that having a background in the targe language may offer additional opportunities for increased exposure to the target language beyond that typically provided by a school language program. In the case of Indonesian, particularly in the primary years, the sample does not include any learners with background (Indonesian or Malay) and in the secondary years, the background learners were removed from the sample for analysis. Thus, the variable of 'time-on-task' could be more readily investigated independently of the background exposure variable. This paper focuses specifically on the impact of time-on-task on achievement for learners of Indonesian by comparing the performance of early and late starters both at the end of primary and beginning of secondary, and at the middle of secondary school.

PARTICIPANTS

At the primary school level, five schools in two states (NSW and South Australia) participated in the study. Participants were in their final year of primary school (Year 6 in NSW, Year 7 in SA) and had studied Indonesian for between one and seven years. None had a background in Indonesian or Malay i.e. all participants at the year 6/7 level were second language learners.

Table 1. Program and participant profile by school (year 6/7 Indonesian)

School No.	State	Freq. x mins /lesson	Total mins /week	Participants by language background*	Total no. of participants
1	NSW	2 x 60	120	*L2* 7	7
2	SA	2 x 50	100	*L2* 12	12
3	SA	3 x 40	120	*L2* 15	15
4	SA	3 x 45	135	*L2* 15	15
5	NSW	2/3 x 50	100–150	*L2* 80	80

*L2 Second language learners

At the junior secondary level, nine schools participated with all but one catering exclusively for second language learners. All students were enrolled in Year 10 which for the NSW and Victorian students meant four years post-primary and for the South Australian group, three years post-primary. To avoid the possible confounding effects of language background on achievement (the majority of Malay background students had taken up Indonesian study in secondary school), the higher performing Malay background group were removed for this analysis.

Table 2. Program and participant profile by school (Year 10 Indonesian)

School No.	State	Freq. x mins /lesson	Total mins /week	Participants by language background*	Total no. of participants
1	NSW	3 x 60	180	***BLL***1 *L2* 9 (*MB* 1)	10
2	NSW	4 x 40	160	*L2* 3	3
3	VIC	3 x 50	150	*L2* 23 (*MB* 8)	23
				L2 11 (*MB* 6)	11
4	NSW	3.5 x 50	175	*L2* 7 (*MB* 1)	8
5	SA	4 x 45	180	*L2* 13	13
6	NSW	2.5 x 50	125	*L2* 5	5
7	SA	5 x 45	225	*L2* 3	3
8	SA	4 x 45–55	180–220	*L2* 3	3
9	SA	4 x 45	180	*L2* 5	5

*BLL Background language learners (with parents of Indonesian origin)

MB Malay background

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws on quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to examine student achievement according to duration of study. The quantitative methods involved test score comparisons between different student subgroups formed on the basis of a self-report questionnaire about duration of study (years the language had been studied at school and/or at community school) (see Elder et al., this issue, for further information). In addition, a subset of test performances matched with learner background profile information were selected on the basis of their score profile and analysed qualitatively to gain insights into the nature of early and late starter achievement.

PEN AND PAPER TESTS

The pen and paper tests at both year 6/7 and year 10 were intended to capture student performance on a range of tasks under test conditions. Consideration was given to making the test content and task demands sufficiently familiar to students to enable them to participate and at the same time sufficiently detached from any particular program to capture achievement independent of specific program content. The tests were administered, by classroom teachers, towards the end of the school year, which meant that students who had commenced at the start of secondary school had experienced close to one full year of study of Indonesian.

While data was gathered for all macro skills, the data for speaking and listening in year 6/7 in particular was unrepresentative due to the limited number of participants. The reliability of speaking and listening was also uncertain due to the difficulty of following a standardized protocol to elicit students' responses. This paper will therefore focus on the more extensive reading and writing data for both year 6/7 and year 10, for which test reliability statistics are available (see Scarino et al., 2011 for full details).

In reading at year 6/7, students were required to complete a written dialogue, label a picture, and read a public sign to extract factual information. In writing, students were asked to write a description of themselves including personal details, family, home, friends and weekend activities and pastimes.

At year 10 level, students completed four tasks: reading and responding to a blog; reading and answering questions related to an advertisement; reading and answering questions related to a public sign, and writing a self-introduction. Responding to the blog and the self-introduction comprised the overall score in Writing.

After marking the tests and conducting reliability checks a series of analyses of score data were undertaken involving a mean score comparison of learners who reported studying for different lengths of time (in years) at the end of primary (Year 6/7) and middle secondary (Year 10) years of schooling.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative analysis involved mean score comparisons between learners who had studied for different lengths of time. Separate analyses were conducted for overall scores and for the particular scoring criteria (Content, Forms/structures, Vocabulary and Discourse) from which these overall scores were derived.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SCRIPTS

The qualitative analysis was based on writing samples of early and late starters with both the primary and middle secondary level sample. For the purpose of discussion in this paper, writing samples only were chosen as these offered the most readily accessible evidence of students' productive capability in the study. To provide further insight into the nature of any differences or similarities between the two groups, a small selection of scripts i.e. one early and one late starter at both Year 6/7 and Year 10, were chosen based on 'time-on-task' and the features of each performance were analysed. The selection of scripts was informed by the details provided on each student's background questionnaire with the view to minimising the background variable impact and therefore choosing samples that were as similar as possible on background factors such as country of birth (student, parents), first language spoken at home and before school. By choosing scripts of students with similar backgrounds the analysis could focus on the major differing variable of duration of study of Indonesian.

FINDINGS BASED ON SCORE DATA

The following results are based on an analysis of the data in reading and writing at both year 6/7 and year 10.

YEAR 6/7

The data for primary Indonesian revealed differing durations of study ranging from 1 to 7 years. Since there was an uneven distribution of learners within this range, it was decided to assign learners to one of three clusters of the continuum namely: those who had studied the language for 1 year only (N=40), for 2–5 years (N= 25), or from 6 to 7 years (N=50). These different time spans proved to be associated with differences in mean levels of achievement, that is, the longer the duration of study, the higher the score achieved (Table 3). An ANOVA analysis showed that the differences between groups were significant both in Writing: $F_{(2, 112)} = 3.6$, p <.05 and in Reading: $F_{(2, 112)} = 3.4$, p <.05.

Table 3. Mean Writing and Reading scores at Year 6/7 by years of Indonesian instruction

	Years of studying Indonesian	N	Max. possible	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Writing	1 year	40		5.70	3.99	0	14
	2 to 5 years	25	20	7.24	4.60	0	17
	6 to 7 years	50		8.20	4.58	0	18
Reading	1 year	40		10.93	4.82	0	20
	2 to 5 years	25	25	11.74	4.92	3	22
	6 to 7 years	50		13.32	3.75	4	20

A post-hoc comparison however revealed that the only significant difference was between the late starter group with 1 year of study and the early starters with 6–7 years of experience. Since 38 of the 40 learners in the 1 year only subgroup were enrolled in a beginners secondary program, this result can be interpreted as indicating that, at least for the learners in this sample, sustained language study (i.e. 6-7 years at primary level) results in higher levels of achievement than what is achieved in a single year of study at secondary level.

A subsequent analysis of the SAALE test score data according to individual scoring criteria was carried out to identify the source of this overall difference in performance in favour of early starters. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean Indonesian Writing scores in each criterion by years of instruction, Year 6/7

Criteria	Years of studying Indonesian	N	Max. possible	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Content	1 year	40		1.70	1.32	0	4
	2 to 5 years	25	5	2.32	1.55	0	4
	6 to 7 years	50		2.36	1.45	0	5
Forms and Structure	1 year	40		1.15	.92	0	3
	2 to 5 years	25	5	1.40	1.15	0	4
	6 to 7 years	50		1.92	1.26	0	5
Vocabulary	1 year	40		1.33	1.16	0	4
	2 to 5 years	25	5	1.72	1.24	0	5
	6 to 7 years	50		1.90	1.34	0	5
Discourse	1 year	40		1.53	1.06	0	3
	2 to 5 years	25	5	1.80	1.19	0	4
	6 to 7 years	50		2.02	.89	0	4

The differences between groups was significant for the criterion *Forms and Structure* ($F_{(2,112)}$ = 5.4, p<.05), but not significant for the other three criteria. Comparison revealed that, again, as with the overall score, the only significant difference was between the sub-group with 1 year of study which was outperformed by that with 6 to 7 years of study.

YEAR 10

At this year level, the sample of second language learners clustered into two major sub-groups, namely: those who had studied Indonesian since primary school (N = 18) and those who began studying it in secondary school (i.e. in Year 7 or 8) (N = 33). The results (Table 5) show no score advantage for students who began studying in primary school, and in fact the means are higher for the late starters. The standard deviations, however, indicate a high variation within each subgroup and a t-test analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference between early and late starters for either Writing or Reading.

Table 5. Mean Indonesian Writing and Reading scores of second language learners (early (primary) versus late (secondary) starters) Year 10

	Group	N	Max. possible	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Writing	Only in secondary school	33	40	21.64	10.07	5	37
	Since primary school	18		16.94	6.98	5	30
Reading	Only in secondary school	33	23	13.39	5.21	2	23
	Since primary school	18		12.94	5.12	2	21

Although the difference in overall scores between late and early starter sub-groups was not significant, a t-test analysis of scores on Writing according to the individual scoring criteria indicated that the late starter group performed significantly better on Discourse (Table16).

Table 6. Mean Indonesian Writing and Reading scores of second language learners for each scoring criterion (early (primary) versus late (secondary) starters) Year 10

Criteria	Group	N	Max. possible	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Content	Only in secondary	33		6.09	2.75	1	10
	Since primary school	18	10	5.11	1.84	2	8
Forms and Structure	Only in secondary	33		5.06	2.56	1	9
	Since primary school	18	10	3.94	1.92	1	7
Vocabulary	Only in secondary	33		5.12	2.51	1	9
	Since primary school	18	10	3.94	1.89	1	9
Discourse	Only in secondary	33		5.36	2.57	1	10
	Since primary school	18	10	3.94	1.63	1	6

The quantitative findings provide a picture of the achievement of students grouped according to duration of study. There is a clear indication at Year 6/7 of the benefits of an early start, in

the sense that those beginning language learning in Year 7 were outperformed by those who had an additional 5-6 years of experience learning the target language, both for overall scores and on the Form and Structures criterion. At Year 10, however, there are no such observable benefits for early starters and there is no significant difference in performance overall between early and late starters. There is furthermore, a significant difference in favour of the late starters on the Discourse criterion. To better understand these findings, a closer, qualitative analysis of student achievement is warranted in order to investigate the nature of performance of selected individuals at each year level.

FINDINGS OF INDIVIDUAL SCRIPT ANALYSES

The following section reports on the findings of the fine grained analysis of a small subset of scripts at year 6/7 and Year 10 which is cross-referenced to each learner's background information and to their scores on the individual assessment criteria. The responses are analyzed separately and then compared below.

SET 1: END OF PRIMARY, JUNIOR SECONDARY

The first student whose sample was selected for closer analysis is an early starter (6 years of study at 100 minutes per week) and the second is a late starter (1 year at approximately 125 minutes per week). Apart from these differences in duration of study, the SAALE background profile data indicates that the two students are similar in background. Both students were born in Australia, as were their parents, and identify English as their first language. Both students are second language learners of Indonesian. As seen in Table 7 below, the early starter performs at a higher level overall than the late starter as well as scoring better on some of the assessment criteria.
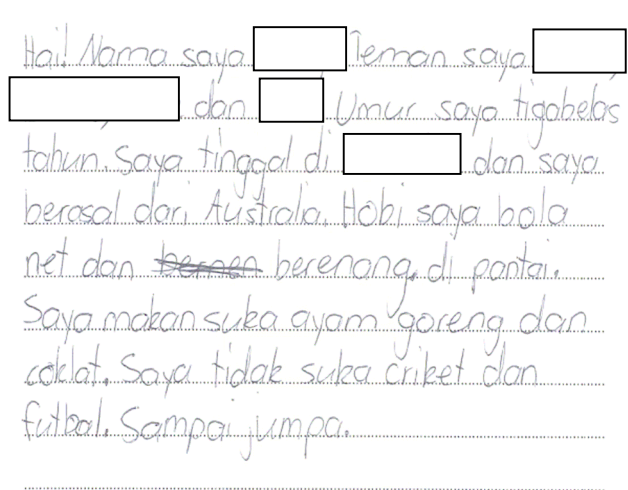
Table 7: Test scores according to criteria for Writing in Indonesian, Year 6/7

	Content	Forms and Structure	Vocabulary	Discourse	Total
	Max. 5	Max. 5	Max. 5	Max. 5	Max. 20
Response 1- (6 years of study)	4	3	4	3	14
Response 2 (1 year of study)	4	1	3	3	11

i) Year 6, early start (six years of study)

Nama Saya [____]
Duabelas tahun
Teman Saya [____] dan [____]
Keluarga saya adik laki-laki
dan Ibu dan Bapak.
Saya suka menonton televisi
Saya suka berenang
Saya tinggal di [____]
Saya tidak suka membaca
buku.
Saya mempunyai satu Kucing
dan dua anjing.
Saya mau menjadi Dokter
Hewan
Saya suka makan dan minum.
Saya Jujur, Ramah dan rajin.
Teman saya [____] dan [____]

The early start student provides a range of information, including personal details such as name and age, family, pets, likes and dislikes, and future career. The response is sequenced logically, moving from personal details to family, hobbies, preferences, and friends. The student refers to quantity using the numbers and the nouns for animals (*anjing, kucing)* to describe her pets. She uses several adjectives to describe her own character i.e. *jujur, ramah, rajin*. She uses the personal pronoun *saya* and its possessive form accurately e.g. *keluarga saya*, *teman saya*. She uses a range of simple verbs such as *suka, makan, minum, tinggal* as well as formulaic *ber-* and *me-* words e.g. *berenang, membaca, mempunyai, menonton*. She uses the formulaic phrase *saya mau menjadi* to state her preferred occupation. Spelling is accurate throughout, including less familiar words such as *dokter hewan*. The student creates cohesion using the simple conjunction *dan*. The response is structured using a series of sentences starting with *saya,* with occasional variation of subject e.g. *teman saya, keluarga saya*.

ii) Year 7, late start (one year of study)

The student who produced the above writing sample, while scoring less overall than the early starter, is one of the higher performing late starters scoring above the mean score for her group. She provides a range of information, including personal details such as name and age, suburb and country of origin. She describes hobbies and likes and dislikes. The student shows awareness of audience and text coherence by using salutations to open and close her response (*hai, sampai jumpa*). She uses the possessive word order correctly (*teman saya, umur saya, hobi saya*). She uses the simple conjunction *dan* and the simple preposition *di* to indicate location. The student has used a range of simple verbs in base and *ber-* prefix form e.g. *suka, makan, berenang, berasal*. She uses the simple negation of verb form *tidak* to state dislikes. The lexical range includes family, friends, sports, food, and locations.

Comparing the responses

In comparing the responses of both students, a number of similarities and differences in the nature of their achievement become apparent. The lexical range of both students is similar which may reflect task demands. Both students use simple possessive word order with the pronoun following the noun and simple negation of verbs. The range of adjectives related to personal character is greater in the first response and may perhaps explain the slightly higher score awarded on the Vocabulary criterion. Most strikingly the early start response includes a greater range and complexity of verb forms e.g. *membaca*, *menjadi*, *minum*, *menonton*, *mempunyai*, compared to no me-prefix verbs in the late starter response. The late starter shows slightly more variation in the text coherence than the early starter who is more reliant

on formulaic sentence patterns. Overall, the early start response shows a greater range of grammatical forms and structures than the late start response. This is reflected in this student's higher score for Grammar and Structures (2 points higher than the later starter) and higher overall performance (Table 7) as would be expected given the increased number of years of exposure to the language system.

Overall, the findings of this qualitative analysis corroborate the broader trend identified in the quantitative analysis in that the early start learner performed at higher levels in Writing than the late starter primarily with regard to Forms and Structures.

SET 2: MIDDLE SECONDARY

Below is the analysis of the responses of two Year 10 students, an early starter continuing in Indonesian from primary school and a late starter who commenced studying Indonesian at the start of secondary school, Year 7. The analysis focuses on the Self-introduction task as this is the more open-ended of the two writing tasks and allows greater potential for students to express themselves more freely than the integrated response to a blog. The students received a similar overall score for the task.

According to the SAALE background data the early start student was born in Australia, as were her parents and her first language is English. She commenced studying Indonesian in year 1 at primary school and also studied French in years 7 and 8 at the beginning of secondary school. The late start student was born in Serbia, to Serbian born parents, and her first language is Serbian. She studied Italian between years 4-6 in primary school and commenced studying Indonesian in Year 7 at the start of secondary school and French in year 7 only. At the time when the data was collected, the early start student was studying in an Indonesian program of 150 minutes per week and the late starter was studying for 180 minutes per week. The database revealed the following scores for each response to Writing Self-introduction:

Table 8. Test scores according to criteria for Writing in Indonesian (Self-introduction), Year 10

	Content Max. 5	Forms and Structure Max. 5	Vocabulary Max. 5	Discourse Max. 5	Total Max. 20
Response 1 (ten years of study)	4	4	5	3	16
Response 2 (four years of study)	5	4	4	4	17

i) Year 10, early start (ten years of study)

Kenalkan! Nama saya [   ] saya tinggal di [   ] dan Sekolah saya bernama [   ]. Pada waktu luang saya bermain bola net dan bersilancar dan berenang di pantai. Saya suka membaca buku dan membaca banyak buku di minggu satu karena saya tinggal jauh dari sekola saya, saya pergi ke sekolah naik mobil dan trem dan kereta api dua kali seminggu. Di sekolah saya tidak suka IPA dan Matematika tetapi saya suka sekali bahasa Ingers. Saya tidak makan daging, dan makan banyak buak-buahan dan sayur-sayuran. Dalam keluarga saya ada lima orang. Kami suka mendengarkan musik dan kami pergi ke "Port fairy folk festival" selalu. Di bulan Juli orang Indonesia tinggal dengan keluarga saya. Dia ramah sekali. Adik laki-laki saya juga belajar bahasa Indonesia.

The response addresses the main ideational content as set out in the task e.g. family, preferences, past-times. The ideas are presented in a list structure with structure provided by prepositional phrases provided in the task description e.g. *Pada waktu luang, Dalam keluarga saya*. A range of vocabulary related to these familiar topics is used including concrete nouns of places and objects e.g. *pantai, sekolah, sayur-sayuran, buah-buahan*. Pronouns include names of family members and the possessive form of *saya* is used accurately. There is use of simple verbs such as *suka, makan, bermain, berenang* and *bersilancar* and use of common *me-* verbs i.e. *membaca, mendengarkan.* The student applies simple negation using *tidak.* There are some inaccuracies in spelling e.g. *tingal, sekola* and

use of prepositions e.g. *Di bulan Juli*. Cohesion is limited to use of simple conjunctions *dan, tetapi*.

ii) Year 10, late start (four years of study)

Hai, nama saya [____] Saya berumur lima belas tahun. Saya ber lahir pada tanggal tujuh belas bulan Januari, 1994. Di keluarga saya ada ~~tiga~~ empat orang. - Bapak saya, Ibu saya, kakak perempuan saya dan saya. Saya juga ada dua burung. Nama mereka [____] dan [____].

Saya pergi ke sekolah di daerah [____]. Nama sekolah is [____] Serindang College. Tadi pagi saya harus bangun pada jam setengah tujuh dan naik kereta api dan bis ke sekolah. ~~Perjet~~ Pelajaran yang paling saya sukai adalah bahasa Inggris, bahasa Indonesia, sejarah dan penjas. Sesudah sekolah saya ke ~~teman~~ luar dengan teman saya. Pada waktu luang saya bermain olahraga atau pergi ke bioskop dengan teman-teman. Teman saya harus bersifat ramah, jujur, sabar dan baik hati. kesayangan Hobi saya ~~adalah~~ berenang, bermain bola basket, bermain tenis dan bermacam-macam olahraga. Saya juga bermain gitar. kesayangan Musik ~~kesayangan~~ saya alternatif atau R&B. Penyanyi yang paling saya sukai dan adalah Red Hot Chilli Peppers. Sering ~~Saya~~ saya bermalas ~~dan~~ mendengar musik. Saya agak tinggi, mata saya biru dan hijau dan rambut saya berwarna cokelat. Pada masa depan saya ingin menjadi wartawan dan ~~ingi~~ ingin mengunjungi banyak negri di dunia.

The response addresses the main topic areas outlined in the task description and extends the content to future aspirations. There is a clear structure to the text overall with topic shifts from more personal aspects such as family to school, free time, friends, career and travel. The range of vocabulary includes concrete nouns such as *burung, bioskop*, *ngeri, dunia* and more abstract nouns such as *pelajaran, kesayangan, wartawan, penyanyi*. The student uses time expressions correctly e.g. *jam setengah tujuh, tadi pagi, sesudah sekolah* to create a narrative sequence. There is a range of adjectives to describe personal qualities e.g. *jujur, sabar, tinggi* with modifier *agak* that creates subtlety. There is a range of simple verbs *bangun, pergi, berwarna, bersifat*, and one *me-* verb although this is incorrectly spelt, *menunjungi*. This student uses the object focus construction (as provided in the task description) *yang paling saya sukai*, with a correct use of *adalah* to express equivalence. There are verb auxiliaries such as *ingin, sering, juga* and *harus* and the conjunctions *atau, dan*, are used to extend sentences.

Comparing the responses

While the responses received scores that differed by only one mark overall, the script analysis reveals more marked differences showing sophistication of content, linguistic structures and textual cohesion in response 2 (late starter) and simpler descriptive content and reliance on formulaic patterns and structures in response 1 (early starter). These differences in the nature of the scripts are reflected on the scores for content and discourse which are one point higher for the late starter.

Overall, the qualitative analysis of individual Year 10 Writing scripts and associated score and background data corroborates the findings of the broader quantitative analysis showing negligible differences between early and late starters at this year level except at the level of particular criteria where it is the late starters who outperform the early starters.

DISCUSSION

The findings in this paper provide insights into how 'time-on-task' affects the nature of achievement by school language learners of Indonesian at the end of primary and middle secondary levels. The analysis of score data by groups showed that the early starters in this study performed at higher levels on average at the end of primary than the late start beginners in junior secondary. At Year 10, there is no statistically significant difference between early and late starters overall but late starters perform better on the Discourse criterion. The analysis of Year 6/7 Writing scripts, albeit limited in number, highlighted how the early starter had used an increased range of forms and vocabulary compared to the late starter. This finding is in accord with the quantitative data analysis and reflects similar findings in previous studies. The analysis of scripts for year 10, revealed how the late starter had performed at a higher level on two criteria in particular, Content and Discourse. This finding also reflected the quantitative analysis of score data by criteria showing that the late starters outperformed their early start peers particularly in the Discourse criterion.

The findings raise issues about how student achievement in school language learning might be understood, how it differs according to time-on-task and what variables influence achievement. While duration of study is a significant factor in increased achievement for participants at the end of primary/junior secondary level, the middle secondary data raises questions as to whether increased time-on-task is indeed the major variable influencing achievement. Factors such as the limited attention to building on prior language learning due to differing teaching, learning and assessment cultures between primary and secondary programs, may be significant in the lack of advantage for early starters (Hill, 2009).

Furthermore, when achievement data is considered in combination with background data, other variables such as exposure to learning other languages emerge as likely influences on achievement. The late start Year 10 student, for example, had Serbian as her first language

and prior study of Italian in primary school and French in junior secondary school. While experience of learning other languages is not directly a focus of this paper, the case of this student is in accordance with other results of the SAALE Year 10 data analysis (Scarino et al., 2011) which showed that students with prior knowledge of at least two languages other than Indonesian received significantly higher scores than those for whom Indonesian was their only language other than English. In addition, the year 10 script analysis showed higher achievement for the student in a program offering half an hour more instruction per week than the early starter program, suggesting that intensity of instruction may also be a factor affecting achievement. Despite a desire to examine intensity in the SAALE study, it was not possible to do this systematically due to the limited number of schools and limited variation in program time allocations in the sample.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The Student Achievement in Asian Languages Education study explored the variable of time-on-task in relation to student achievement in school language programs as operationalized in years of studying the target language in the Australian school context. The quantitative data findings for early and late start students of Indonesian in this study echo the results of earlier studies (Burstall et al., 1974; Hill et al., 1997) indicating that in general early starters initially perform at a higher level in some macro skills such as reading and writing, with late starters reaching the same or higher standard by the middle years of secondary school. The analysis of score data at the level of criteria indicates that achievement varies according to different criteria, with early starters in primary achieving higher levels due to their knowledge of forms and structures, and late starters in middle secondary achieving higher scores than early starters in relation to discourse. The analysis of individual scripts illustrates the nature of such differences in performance.

This paper reveals the complexity of describing student achievement in relation to isolated variables such as time-on-task and the limitations of test measures in reflecting the nature of achievement. It is evident that time-on-task alone cannot account for learner achievement and that, particularly in higher levels of schooling, other variables such as exposure to learning other languages, intensity of instruction, and learner background may be influential factors. The SAALE methodology itself may have been limited in that, as Elder et al. (this issue) have noted logistical factors constrained the range and types of tasks used to elicit student performance. This meant that dimensions of language learning such as intercultural understanding and learning strategies were not explicitly addressed. Such factors may be significant in understanding achievement of young learners given the importance placed on them in school language programs and given the high proportion of year 10 students who had studied two or more languages other than Indonesian, who received the top test scores in the SAALE study. This paper highlights the need to consider multiple variables such as student

maturity and motivation (McKay, 2006), exposure to environmental media and the culture of assessment itself (Hill, 2009) in how we assess and describe student achievement in language learning. Further research needs to be carried out which includes alternative assessment approaches that may be able to shed light on the complex development of language learning in school-aged learners and in doing so, do maximum justice to their learning.

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ENDNOTES

i   'Time-on-task' refers to the duration of study which is recognised as a major factor in second language acquisition