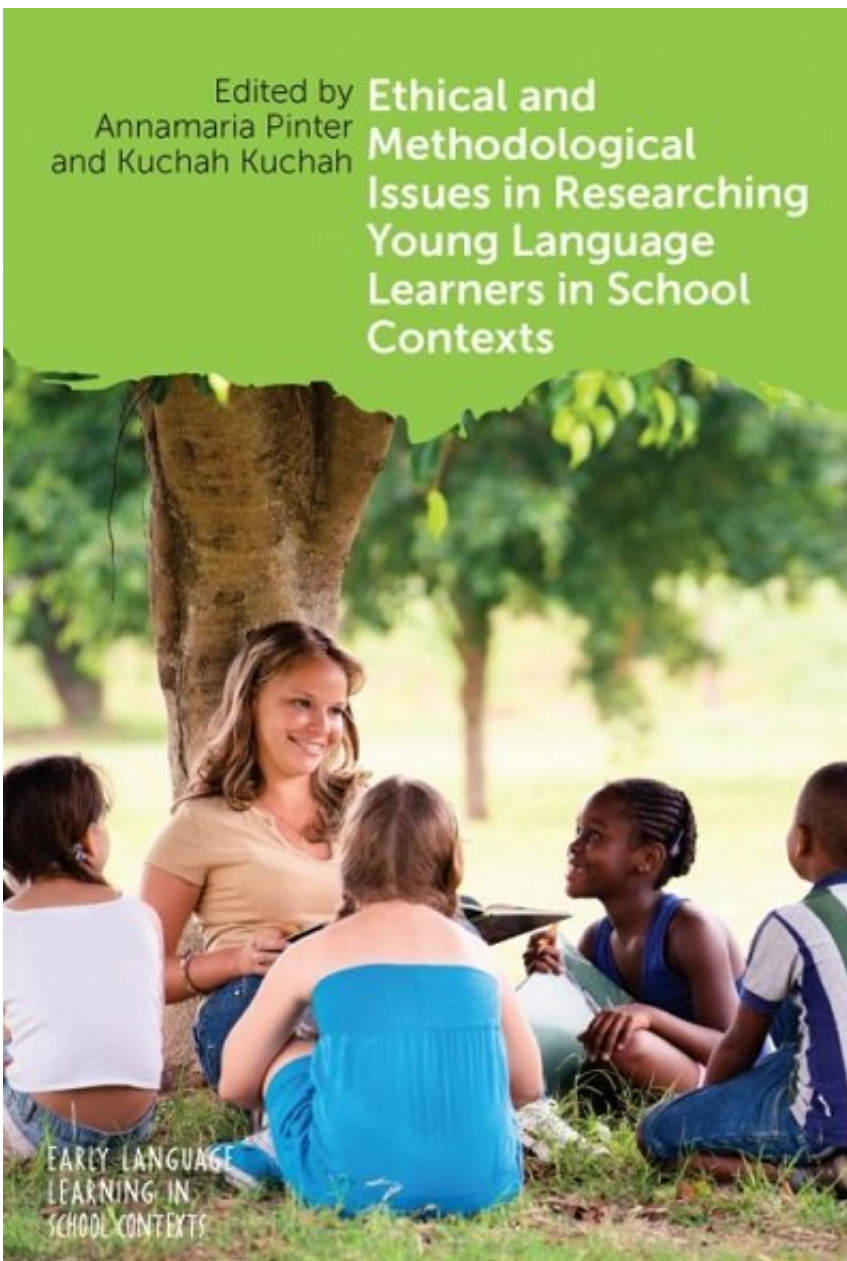


Best practices for researching with child language learners explored in new book

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Credit: University of Warwick

The ethical practices, dilemmas and challenges of classroom research involving child language learners are the focus of a new book edited by Dr. Annamaria Pinter of the University of Warwick's Department of Applied Linguistics and Dr. Harry Kuchah of the University of Leeds.

"Ethical and Methodological Issues in Researching Young Language Learners in School Contexts" offers a rich tapestry of insights from a selection of research projects around the world, in the hope of contributing to shaping research, [teacher education](#) and teaching practices in a positive way.

Dr. Pinter and Dr. Kuchah argue that [children](#)'s own understanding of research and their role in it has been neglected in existing work on research ethics, and suggest that a research approach which centers children as participants and even co-investigators rather than passive providers of research data is more likely to respect children's rights, promote social justice and help researchers gain insights that can inform or challenge current policy and practice.

The authors believe that the need for high-quality research is becoming urgent as more and more countries are introducing [foreign languages](#)—particularly English—into the primary school curriculum without careful thought about the implications for children's overall cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Dr. Pinter said: "We noticed a few years ago that a great deal had been written about [ethical issues](#) in research with adult language learners but not with children even though research with child language learners is a fast-growing field.

"We wanted to put together a volume where well-known researchers in our field reflected on their work with a sharp focus on ethics and how ethics interacted with methodological choices, and offered some reflections about the dilemmas they faced in their own research.

"In bringing together the team of authors, we wanted to share the messy side of child focused research which is not often represented in neatly written academic publications."

The book is set out in three sections, the first focused on involving children as active participants in research; the second on ethical challenges in multilingual contexts and the third on links between teacher education and research with children. The contributors discuss the ethical dilemmas, challenges and experiences that they have encountered and grappled with, in studies of all kinds from large scale, experimental studies to ethnographic studies focused on just a handful of children

The authors highlight the additional challenges and complexities presented by working with children—while the overall ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity remain paramount, these responsibilities are not straightforward to achieve given the hierarchical nature of schools, where teachers and parents are used to taking decisions on behalf of children and young people, and the influence of out-of-school factors.

Dr. Kuchah added: "Researching young language learners in school contexts is a fascinating but complex web in itself and needs to be approached carefully and thoughtfully.

"The book idea emerged from our discussions of different methodological activities with young learners and our realization that children in different school contexts respond to the same practices in completely different ways.

"The chapters in this book have all challenged and enriched our thinking around the need for contextual awareness in research. We found that there are many out-of-school factors that might, and actually do, influence the way children relate in research encounters and that both 'insider' and 'outsider' researchers will need to invest in understanding these factors in their design of research activities with children.

"We suggest that all researchers—irrespective of their focus and the type of role they choose to assign to children—must familiarize themselves with the relevant official ethical guidelines, explore the characteristics of local contexts and explicitly develop their own reflexive ethical awareness to guide them through their work. School research which is sensitive to children's home and learning [context](#) and underpinned by global and local ethical considerations can help make the implementation of [language](#) education policies more effective in each context."

More information: Ethical and Methodological Issues in Researching Young Language Learners in School Contexts, edited by: Annamaria Pinter and Kuchah Kuchah, is published by Multilingual Matters. ISBN: 9781800411418

Annamaria Pinter is Reader at the Department of Applied Linguistics, the University of Warwick, UK. She is the author of Teaching Young Language Learners (Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 2017) and Children Learning Second Languages (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Provided by University of Warwick

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