

# Critical Evaluation of the Helen Doron Early English Method

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**Rolj Kovačević, Dora**

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Dora Rolj Kovačević

Critical Evaluation of the Helen Doron Early English Method

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Mentor: izv. prof. dr. sc. Višnja Pavičić Takač

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## Summary

This diploma paper describes and critically evaluates the features of the Helen Doron English method (HDEE). The HDEE method is a unique method for teaching babies, toddlers, and children English by using mother tongue approach to language learning, combined with the onset of education very early in the childhood. In the theoretical part of the paper, the development of the method and its characteristics are described and fitted into a framework of the traditional English language teaching methods and approaches. In addition, the characteristics of the method are divided into cognitive, affective, and linguistic, and they are evaluated according to relevant research findings and theories found in the literature. This part provides an outline for the further investigation of the characteristics of the method in the research part of the paper. In the research part, the results from the questionnaire distributed among the parents of children attending the HDEE lessons are presented, and the cognitive, linguistic, and affective characteristics of the method from the theoretical part are being reanalyzed. In the conclusion part, the method is critically evaluated by taking into consideration theoretical assumptions complemented with the research results.

Keywords: HDEE, mother tongue approach, critical period, children, second language acquisition

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, there is a trend in the second language education that it should begin very early in the childhood, because this way the high proficiency in the second language is ensured. English language learning and teaching are highly affected by this trend, because English is spoken worldwide and it is very popular due to media and popular culture. In addition, it is a language of business, and people who speak English well are considered to have a huge advantage over the others in general. Therefore, parents nowadays want to provide every possible advantage for their children, and, influenced by media and examples of successful second language acquisition in children from bilingual surroundings, enrol their children to the English courses very early, usually in the kindergarten. Recognizing all the advantages of early English learning, the Helen Doron Early English method was developed to offer parents English courses for their children that can start at the 3 months of age, which is thought to guarantee the development of the English language parallel with the development of the first language.

However, although early start in the second language education undeniably has many advantages, the facts that it would guarantee very high language proficiency, and that this is the only way to achieve it, should not be taken for granted. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to question and critically evaluate the assumptions of the approach of the Helen Doron Early English that are concerned with early beginning of English learning in a mother tongue-like manner.

In the theoretical background of this paper, the Helen Doron Early English methodology will be presented and fitted into the framework of other methods and approaches to the SLA that are available in the literature. The description of the method will be followed by a critical evaluation of cognitive, linguistic, and affective aspects of the method by using relevant research findings from the literature.

In the research part of the method, the results from the questionnaire distributed among the parents of school children attending the HDEE courses will be presented. These results should provide additional information about the aspects of the method that are described in the theoretical background, and inform about application of the HDEE method ideas to practice. The results will then be discussed and interpreted in the light of previously evaluated aspects of the method from the theoretical part.

The paper will be concluded with an opinion about the HDEE method, which will be formed by taking both theoretical assumptions and practical results into consideration.

## 2. Theoretical Background

The aims of the theoretical background are to provide description of the features of the Helen Doron Early English (HDEE) method, to put the method into the framework of theory of foreign language teaching methodology, and to point out the characteristics of the method that will be discussed in the research. The theoretical background begins with Helen Doron's biography and the influences she had in the development of the method, including descriptions of the methodologies by Doman and Suzuki. It continues to the development of the method, which covers the process of combining the features of the previously described methods with Doron's solutions to the shortcomings of the traditional methods, leading to the creation of four fundamental principles of the HDEE method, and to the description of the programme that the method carries out. It ends with categorization of the method within the approaches to language learning and teaching discussed in the literature, and finally with critical evaluation of the cognitive, linguistic, and affective characteristics of the method on the basis of findings presented in the literature.

### 2.1. Life of Helen Doron and Birth of the Idea for the Method

At the beginning of the description of the method, it is important to portray the life of its creator, Helen Doron, and to describe how certain events influenced her idea for the development of the method. Doron describes her life and inspiration for creating the HDEE method in her book *The Music of Language* (2010). She was born on 5th November 1955 in an Israeli family in London. Today she is a linguist and a successful entrepreneur who sells rights to her franchise called Helen Doron Early English in over 30 countries all over the world, with over 50 Master Franchise areas, 550 Learning Centre franchises, over 3000 teachers, and about 100.000 students at the moment. The community is still growing, with Helen Doron holding seminars to the teachers and promoting her method to parents.

When she was little, her parents influenced her love for books and reading, and her grandpa was a successful entrepreneur who became her role model for starting the HDEE franchise later. Her attending the Montessori kindergarten was the beginning of her education, and since her first contact with learning was in an alternative way, no wonder she came to the idea of teaching in a similar way later. At school, she was very good at math, and she also began learning foreign languages at the age of 7 which was very unusual at the time. She was also a

talented singer and a piano player, but she never managed to make her music career. When she was 13, she had to switch school, and suddenly started to fall behind with maths and science, so she switched her focus to languages, especially French. Being discouraged by her French teacher that she would never succeed, she went to France to a summer course and she perfected her French. The events from her childhood and education were actually the foundation for the future business - interest in maths and sciences, talent in music, high language aptitude, and developed awareness of educational methods, and her experiences are reflected in the whole philosophy of the HDEE method. For example, Doron (2010) claims that she decided that it was necessary to take a holistic approach to learners to obtain best results, because at one point in life she had health issues and realized that it was not enough to only change her diet. Only when she took up meditation and homeopathy did she notice positive changes. Later, at college, she earned a degree in Linguistics and French, but also the knowledge of language acquisition in children, which laid foundations for the future of the HDEE.

Doron (2010) claims that her first contact with the mother tongue approach to learning was at the time she became a mother. During her third pregnancy, she heard about Glenn Doman's courses for teaching specific knowledge to babies and infants, so she enrolled, and applied his method to her own children. The results were that her children learned to read at the age of two, they learned to recognize patterns, and they learned encyclopedic knowledge. Another method that influenced Helen Doron was Suzuki's method for teaching violin. She took her daughter to one of Suzuki's classes when she was 4, and decided to study the method he used more thoroughly – the children first learn how to make music, and later they learn to read music. It is called the mother tongue approach – first, the babies hear the sounds, then they experiment with them, and later they learn how to speak, read, and write. Doman's method and theories on early brain stimulation as well as Suzuki's method will be described in more detail in the following parts.

## 2.2. Influences of Theories on Early Brain Stimulation and their Application to the Second Language Acquisition

### 2.2.1. Doman's Methodology

It has already been claimed that Helen Doron recognised the importance of early stimulation when it comes to learning, so she decided to apply the knowledge from the theories on early brain development, especially the aspects of the Doman Method, to her early English



courses.

Sears (as quoted in Doron, 2010) claims that the intellect of the person is shaped through their genetic makeup only partially, and that early brain stimulation (from the environment) creates neural pathways, which are significant for the potential for storing and retrieving information. Therefore, according to Sears, the best time for stimulation is from birth on, since the brain grows fastest in the first year, doubles in its size, and reaches 60% of its adult size.

When it comes to early brain stimulation, Doron followed the findings of Glenn Doman who was, according to Doron (2010), one of the first in studying accelerated learning in children and specialized in child brain development. Doron (2010) explains that he led the research to help brain injured children, applied various techniques of early brain stimulation, and came to amazing results, with many brain-damaged and developmentally challenged children ending up as healthy and often gifted. After realizing how much potential lies in the early brain training, Doman decided to apply his method to teaching healthy children in his Institute for the Achievement of Human Potential, creating baby geniuses who could read, count, and develop other talents before the age of two.

Therefore, when it comes to language acquisition, Doron (2010) recognized and explained the benefits of the addition of the second language as early as possible, parallel to the native language acquisition. According to Raphiq (2007, as quoted in Doron, 2010), all language is stored and processed in two areas in the brain called Wernicke's area (in the left temporal lobe) and Broca's area (in the left frontal lobe). There is also a distinct separation between the mother tongue and a language that is acquired later, and in case of true bilingualism, when both languages are acquired at infancy or early in childhood, they are stored in the same place in the Broca's area. However, if the language is acquired later, and even to a high level of proficiency, it is stored and processed in a different place within the Broca's area.

Mother-tongue is permanently coded into the brain, because it is being acquired at the time when the brain is establishing neural pathways. Infants acquire the language not only by absorbing all the audio input, but also by making associations between sounds and meaning. They are also exposed to the *motherese* kind of talk, which draws baby's attention even more.

In addition, babies learn all six levels of language (prosody, phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics) simultaneously, and that prosody is already being absorbed *in utero*. Research over the past decades has shown the existence of the large number of natural techniques used by babies and infants to analyse their mother-tongue.

Influenced by Suzuki's idea of the mother-tongue approach to learning, Doron (2010)

concluded that it would be suitable to take advantage of the process of mother-tongue acquisition, and to include the acquisition of English into it.

#### 2.2.2. Influences of the Suzuki Method

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki founded the worldwide music education movement known as the Suzuki Method, which was inspired by his observation of children learning their mother tongues with ease through listening, imitation, and repetition, and came across the idea of teaching children how to play violin in a similar manner. Suzuki's goal was to influence not only a child's ability and talent to play music, but the whole character, and his method focuses on nurture of the child through music (<http://www.suzukimusic.org.au/suzuki.htm#how>).

According to Suzuki (2002) our abilities are developed from the birth on and depend on our surroundings, while the inborn talent plays a minor role. As an example, Suzuki (2002) mentions Einstein and Goethe, and claims that if they had been born in the Stone Age, they would have had nothing but only the characteristics of the Stone Age people; and similarly, if he had a chance to teach music to a Stone Age infant, the child would soon be able to play Beethoven's *Violin Sonata*.

In addition, Suzuki (2002) explains that it is very important to train parents first, and then the child, because besides the fact that parents play an important role in encouraging a child to speak their mother tongue by praising him and making him do it again and again, they are also role models for him. In the Suzuki's method, the teachers first teach a mother to play one piece in order to be a good teacher at home. At the same time, the child should listen to the piece recorded on the tape every day at home, and observe other children and his parent practicing in the class. The goal is that the child gets the wish to play the instrument like his parent and other children, and to start perceiving it as a means of having fun. When the child takes the instrument, he already knows the melody and is highly motivated to play and practice, and the parents are there to teach him the proper posture and technique.

According to Doron (2010), the biggest revelation that Suzuki's method brings is the idea of children first learning how to make music, and reading the music later, because the same sequence applies to the mother tongue. Similarly, Doron chose to let children first listen and then start speaking when they are ready. Other aspects that Doron takes from the Suzuki's method are that all children can learn a foreign language if it is taught to them in a supportive environment, and that learning a language should be fun and effortless if taught in a natural way, with the child's wish to join the learning.

### 2.3. Development of HDEE Method

By studying Doman's and Suzuki's methodologies for early learning, Doron (2010) has recognized the three imperatives that can be applied to foreign language instruction: you should teach as early as possible, you should teach the music of language (mother-tongue learning), and you should create a teaching environment that is fun and non-stressful and where behaviour is shaped through positive reinforcement.

In addition, she recognized the shortcomings of the traditional English teaching: students are expected to master all aspects of language simultaneously (reading, writing, speaking, understanding, grammar and phonics), which is unnatural, students do not get enough of individual speaking time, they do not receive enough direct feedback, pronunciation suffers, fear leads to failure, and the traditional methodology focuses on correction.

Combining the cognizance about the importance of early language acquisition based on Suzuki's and Doman's methodologies for early learning and mother-tongue approach with the recognition of failure of the traditional methods, Doron created the HDEE method. Doron's solutions to the problems of the traditional way of teaching and fundamental principles of the HDEE method as well as the programme and courses that HDEE offers will be described in more detail in the following two chapters.

#### 2.3.1. Doron's Solutions to the Shortcomings of the Traditional Methods

First, Doron (2010) points out that it is very confusing for a child to master listening, comprehension, reading, writing, and oral reproduction at the same time. Her response to the traditional method is that children should first listen to the language and tune their ear to it, then they should speak, and finally read and write, because it is a natural sequence of skills in the mother tongue, and it should be the same for the second, third, or fourth language. Moreover, according to Johnson and Newport (1989, as cited in Doron, 2010) the younger the child is, the better he can learn. Also, the HDEE is the first method that supports spoken language as a requirement for reading and writing, following the recent research that shows the importance of acquisition of the phonology in order for the student to read and write well. Maclean et al. (1987, as cited in Doron, 2010), who claim that children who have many nursery rhymes read to them are more successful in reading and writing later on, support the idea.

Second, the problem that Doron (2010) noticed was that students do not get enough individual speaking time. She claims that learning to speak a language involves "a sophisticated

and subtle interplay of vocalising and hearing” (Doron, 2010:43) and the fact that “we hear ourselves and adjust our efforts dynamically” (Doron, 2010:43). Moreover, children in the classroom repeat in groups, which makes it harder for the teacher to detect mistakes by the individuals, but even more important, students do not hear their own voice.

The next problem that occurs in the traditional English teaching classroom is that the students do not receive enough direct feedback. Doron (2010) points out that there is no school system that offers the level of direct feedback that can be compared with the interaction that toddlers have with their parents.

Another issue that traditional education has is pronunciation. The lack of consistency in the pronunciation of English is a minor problem in comparison to the problem of late-start acquisition in the first place. Doron (2010) claims that what causes the problem is the fact that the ability to pronounce different sounds, including mouth shape and correct placement of the tongue, as well as overall language acquisition aptitude, ends up before the start of formal language education. Kuniyoshi (as cited in Doron, 2010) claims that the phenomenon can be exemplified by Japanese adults not being able to distinguish between *l* and *r* sounds properly, while Japanese babies can, and they lose that ability as soon as they begin to be verbal in their native language.

The next issue of the traditional language education is inhibition. Although the fear of failure is not a characteristic of language classes only, it is more present there than in any other subject. According to Doron (2010), this is mainly the case with older students, who are more likely to be shy and self-conscious when trying to speak a language in the classroom, and repeated failure to speak correctly may cause them to develop aversion to a language.

The fear of speaking a language might be caused by the last problem pointed out by Doron (2010), concerning the traditional education models focusing on correction. Language students, who are already suffering from the previously mentioned anxiety, are even more discouraged by being corrected every time they try to speak.

According to Doron (2010) these six issues of traditional education work against the acquisition of successful and fluent language skills, and recognising the failure in the existing system is the first step in creating something new, and offering a better way to teach English.

### 2.3.2. Four Fundamental Principles of HDEE Method

In order to summarize all her findings, Doron (2010) has developed the four principles of HDEE methodology which serve as a base of the HDEE learning programmes: 1) repeated

background home hearing, 2) positive reinforcement, 3) making learning fun, and 4) building on success.

Repeated background home hearing replicates the mother-tongue language acquisition by creating an immersion system, and it is done with the audio portion playing in the background. In the HDEE programme, babies and children hear the tapes at home a few times a day, and then they hear them again in the class, accompanied by pictures, movements, and other props, so the children gradually grasp the meaning (Doron, 2010). Since the child's attention to the background portion is only peripheral, it goes straight to the long-term memory and becomes hard-wired, and once the content is understood, it becomes a basis for building more comprehension. Another principle of the background home hearing is that there is no pressure on the child to start speaking immediately. Since listening before speaking is natural, it is normal for babies and children in early programmes to not listen or participate at all, but then they gradually join during songs. This is very different from the call-and-response method that the traditional classes use, and the immersion system of the background home hearing recognises the need of the brain to become familiar with the sounds, and starts perceiving them as something comfortable and enjoyable. However, she stresses the importance of exposing a child to language at home at an everyday basis and as much as possible in order to obtain best results (Doron, 2010).

When it comes to positive reinforcement, it is thought to be crucial for early language acquisition. For example, when babies produce their first sounds, parents encourage them by praising and smiling, and babies want to do this more. The feeling of success motivates every child, and in the HDEE methodology it is achieved by creating a non-threatening, comfortable, and pleasant environment in which a teacher praises and encourages every success, no matter how small (Doron, 2010). The feeling of success encourages a child to try more, to participate more, and finally to learn more.

The HDEE method also promotes learning in a fun way by using games, songs, and other interesting activities. In HDEE classes, everything is bright, colourful, and fun, so it feels more like playing than learning, and creates a pleasant, supportive environment. While these games and activities are entertaining for the children, they are actually intentionally and carefully planned lessons, based on methodically designed materials that aid spontaneous learning.

Building on success means that a child attending Helen Doron courses should feel successful at every moment. Even if a child gives a wrong answer, the HDEE teacher gives the correct answer with a smile, the child repeats it, and the teacher praises the child. In addition,

when a child succeeds at one level, he can move to the next, but there should never be the sense of being overwhelmed (Doron, 2010)

### 2.3.3. HDEE Courses and Programmes

As said, in HDEE programme there is always the opportunity to move forward and the courses are designed to support each other, and when a child reaches a certain level of competence at one level, he can move to the next one that includes familiar materials on which to build (Doron, 2010). There are ten courses designed for the age between 3 months and 14 years, and three additional courses. However, not all students will start as early as at 3 months of age, but parents might discover the method later and enrol their children at the age of 3, 6, or even later. Managing mixed classes requires careful balancing, because classes should provide enough challenge for the children that have mastered the previous level, and give enough support to those that have just started. Anyway, groups are never larger than 8 students, so each of them receives plenty of individual attention. In this chapter, the courses that the HDEE method offers will be described in a sequence in which the learners can attend them. Also, three additional courses will be described.

The first programme that babies can attend starts as early as when the baby is 3 months old, and includes a caregiver. This is called *Baby's Best Start*, and it enriches parent-child communication through songs, games, baby sign language, and developmental activities. Babies learn over 550 words and 24 songs that are composed with different rhythms and styles from all around the world. Babies learn English like a mother tongue, and they communicate through songs, games, and fun physical activities, but they also expand their musical awareness and appreciation of other cultures.

*English for Infants* is a beginner or follow-up course for ages 2-4 years. Activity books at this point include stickers, colouring activities, etc., and children learn through music, rhymes, and stories. They learn over 300 words and 16 songs, and develop their motor and cognitive skills. The follow-up course of *English for Infants* is called *More English for Infants*, and it is meant for children of 3-5 years of age. *More English for Infants* teaches children over 600 words and 16 songs, which include elements of the English culture.

*First English for All Children* is a beginner or a follow-up course for ages 4-6 years, which teaches 800 words and 32 songs. *English for all Children* and *More English for All Children*, which end up when children are 10 years old, follow this programme. In these courses children use English as they interact and play games, they learn grammatical structures naturally,

and compose their own sentences. Each of these courses also covers reading, writing, spelling, and *English for All Children* and *More English for All Children* include assessment.

The next programme is called *Play on in English*, and is meant for children between 5 and 8 years. At this point, children can be taught over 1000 words after a few years of learning, and achieve native-like knowledge. There is also an option of reading and writing, and the course includes assessments. Children learn through songs and drama, and gain knowledge about nature.

*Botty the Robot teaches you English* is for children between 7 and 11 years of age. In this course, children follow a musical comedy on video and with books, and they develop their reading, writing, phonics, basic grammatical structures, and conversational skills. The course teaches over 1400 words, includes 12 songs, introduces basic grammatical structures of English, and includes assessment.

*Paul Ward's World* and *Paul Ward and the Treasure* are for children ages 8 to 12 and 9 to 14 years. The *Paul Ward's World* covers all the required subject matter for the 4th and 5th grades at school, and teaches children 1700 words and 8 songs. *Paul Ward and the Treasure* combines the HDEE methodology with "Suggestopedia", which will be described in more detail later. This course covers the subject matter for the 5th and 6th grades at school, and teaches about 2000 words and 8 songs. In these courses, children learn through songs, tongue-twisters, multi-sensory experiences, etc., and it gives them a solid basis in reading and writing in English. Both courses include assessments.

The HDEE programme finishes at the age of 14, and besides these programmes, additional *Holiday Courses*, school programmes *Super Nature 1* and *2*, and kindergarten programmes *Didi the Dragon* and *Polly the Collie* are also offered. *Holiday Courses* are meant for new or existing students, ages 4 to 14, and they are one to four weeks long. In these courses, students are taught spoken English, as well as reading, writing, and grammar, and they prepare English students for the upcoming school year. The school programmes *Super-Nature 1 and 2* are designed for teaching at schools in large groups, in grades 1 to 3 (Doron, 2010). According to Doron (2010) *Super-Nature 1 and 2* develop appreciation of nature and ecology through fun songs, interactive games and activities in English, and children are taught about 500 English words in each course. The kindergarten programmes *Didi the Dragon* and *Polly the Collie* are meant for large kindergarten groups for ages 2 to 7, and in these programmes children learn English through videos, songs, rhymes, and fun activities.

## 2.4. Putting the HDEE Method into the Framework of Theory of English Language Teaching Methodology

Since the HDEE method uses a very complex and eclectic system, it is not easy to accurately classify it into the framework of any of the approaches, methods, or techniques of second language learning and teaching described by Richards and Rodgers (2001).

Before any attempts to categorize the HDEE method, it is important to distinguish between the three levels of classifying methodological features used for description of any kind of methodology. Richards and Rodgers (2001) review Anthony's model (1963), in which the terms *approach*, *method*, and *technique* are used. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) these terms work in a hierarchical order, with the term *approach* meaning "the level at which assumptions about language and language learning are specified" (Anthony, 1963:63-67, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001:19). The term *method* refers to "the level at which theory is being put into practice, and at which choices are made about the particular skills (...) and content to be taught, and the order in which the content will be presented" (Anthony, 1963:63-67, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001:19). The term *technique* covers "the level at which classroom procedures are described" (Anthony, 1963:63-67, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001:19). However, Richards and Rodgers (2001) provide a more comprehensive model for the description of different teaching methodologies, and they use the terms *approach*, *design*, and *procedure*. For the purpose of this paper, the approach, the design, and the procedure of the HDEE method will be described and compared with the approaches described by Richards and Rodgers (2001) to see whether the method could be fitted into the framework of any of them.

### 2.4.1. Approach Used by the HDEE Method

Considering the previously described features of the HDEE method, it can be concluded that it belongs to the Natural Approach developed by Krashen and Terrel (1983), and therefore, according to the classification of Richards and Rodgers (2001), to the Communicative Approach, since the Natural Approach is actually an example of the communicative approach. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), both the Natural and Communicative Approach perceive communication as the main function of the language. As it is visible from the description of the HDEE programmes, the primary focus is on communication through songs, speaking, playing, and interaction, with no explicit grammar teaching. Also, Kovács (as cited in Doron, 2010) claims that the HDEE method includes the Total Physical Response (TPR), since learning is



based on activity. However, from this point on, the HDEE method will be observed as the method that uses the Natural Approach, because besides the resemblance with the Communicative Approach when it comes to strong focus on fluent communication in English, and with the TPR approach when it comes to activity-based learning, the main features of the method resemble more the Natural Approach.

Another aspect that defines the approach according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), besides the perception of the role of the language (in this case communicative), is the assumption about theory of learning. When it comes to the theory of learning, HDEE method again fits into the aspects of the Natural Approach, i.e. into Krashen's language acquisition theory. Krashen (1982, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001) describes his theory by using five hypotheses, namely *The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis*, *The Monitor Hypothesis*, *The Natural Order Hypothesis*, *The Input Hypothesis*, and *The Affective Filter Hypothesis*, with four of them (accept for *The Monitor Hypothesis*) being clearly recognizable in the HDEE method.

*The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis* distinguishes between the two processes of gaining competence in a second language, namely acquisition and learning. According to Krashen (1982, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001) learning refers to the knowledge of the rules and does not lead to acquisition, while acquisition is a natural way of learning. The HDEE method also follows the idea that a language should be acquired in a natural way with no explicit learning of the rules, which matches the description of the Natural Approach as "paralleling first language development in children" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:81).

*The Natural Order Hypothesis* assumes that the acquisition of the second language structures appears in the same, natural order as in the first language acquisition. Similar view is accepted in the HDEE method, with the special stress on the natural, mother-tongue-like acquisition, and besides acquiring language structures in a natural order, there is also a natural order of skills.

*The Input Hypothesis* supports the belief that the input that the learners receive should be comprehensible, but containing information slightly beyond their current level of comprehension (i.e.  $i+1$ ) (Krashen 1982, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001). This view translates to the HDEE method due to the fact that "the trick is to provide just enough challenge to stimulate growth and allow the child to succeed" (Doron, 2010:52). In addition, Richards and Rodgers (2001) explain that, in the Krashen's theory, the ability to speak cannot be taught directly, but that it appears when the speaker is ready. A similar view is accepted by Doron – children in the HDEE programme are never forced to speak, but they are granted a silent period, just like

children acquiring the native language. The third similarity found between the HDEE method and Krashen's *Input Hypothesis* is that the input is made more comprehensible if it is properly simplified for the learner, such as by means of *caretaker speech* addressed to children acquiring their native language (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). In the HDEE method, the input is surely adapted to children, since one of the basic principles of the method is to make learning fun, which includes a lot of games, songs, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, etc., with the purpose of attracting child's attention by making language as child-friendly as possible.

*The Affective Filter Hypothesis* is clearly mirrored in the HDEE method, because it promotes the belief that high motivation, self-confidence, and low anxiety in learners promote better language acquisition (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). The HDEE method, as said, relies very much on the affective side of language acquisition by creating a comfortable learning environment in which children are praised a lot and mistakes are dealt with in a gentle way. Also, the fact that the method is designed for children, who are free of any prejudices about language learning, speaks for the superiority of children over adults when it comes to language acquisition, and the same conclusion can be found in the description of the Natural Approach (c.f. Richards and Rodgers, 2001). In addition to the *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, it is also important to mention that the approach of the HDEE method resembles Rogers's psycholinguistic view of human learning which supports the humanistic, learner-centred, holistic approach to the learners, and also stands for the importance of the affective side of the language acquisition process (Rogers, 1951, as cited in Brown, 2000).

On the whole, the conclusion is that the HDEE method can be fitted into the framework of the Natural Approach, with some elements of the Communicative, Humanistic, and TPR approach. However, the method itself is very special and complex, and Doron does not mention any particular approach that she is following, except from *Suggestopedia*, which is used in the *Paul Ward and the Treasure* programme. *Suggestopedia* is an educational innovation that combines relaxed state of mind (through music) with usual classroom activities (reading, drama, role-play, vocabulary presentation, etc.) (Brown, 2000).

#### 2.4.2. Design and Procedure of the HDEE Method

According to Richards and Rogers (2001), the design of a certain methodology refers to the description of objectives, the syllabus, types of learning and teaching activities, learner roles, teacher roles, and role of instructional materials, and the procedure stands for the techniques used in classroom during the application of a certain method. Even though the HDEE

methodology mainly follows the Natural Approach when it comes to design of the method, it does not exactly follow the features proposed by Krashen and Terrel (1983, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001), although there are many similarities. For the purpose of this paper, the design and procedure of the HDEE method will be described, with the description of the procedure included into the description of the features of the design, and only the similarities with the Natural Approach will be mentioned.

First of all, the objective of the HDEE method is to enable the learners the achievement of the native-like proficiency in English, provided that learning begins as early as possible ([http://www.helendoron.com/arch\\_english\\_for\\_children\\_special.php](http://www.helendoron.com/arch_english_for_children_special.php)).

The syllabus consists of consecutive teaching materials made for the time of ten years. It is built upon proven methodology, using age-relevant lesson plans, which allow children to have lots of fun and gives the teachers the freedom to be creative and express new ideas. In addition, at the time when the assessment has to take place, there is an assessment system designed according to international standards (<http://www.helendoron.com/faq-teachers.php#>). Doron (2005) claims that, since parents want to check the progress of the older children, and to see whether the HDEE method fits into recognized standards of English teaching, the HDEE method offers placement and assessment tests. Frankiewicz and Doron (2006) explain that the assessment tests check how well the student knows the specific materials and it also checks speaking, understanding, reading and writing, while the placement tests check what material would be suitable for the new student to learn with. In comparison with the syllabus design of the Natural Approach, there is again a similarity in the sense of matching the course with the particular needs and interests of the students, and creating a relaxed, friendly atmosphere (Krashen and Terrel 1983, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

When it comes to type of learning and teaching activities used in the HDEE method, as has already been said, they are meant to be fun, and mostly include singing, playing, role-play, drawing and colouring, dancing, etc. Again, there is a similarity with the Natural Approach, because both the HDEE method and Krashen and Terrel's method actually borrow the types of the activities from other methods and approaches, e.g. command-based activities from TPR, and group work activities that require interaction between students in order to complete the task from The Communicative Approach (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). In addition, according to Kovács (as cited in Doron, 2010), a child is a meaning maker in the HDEE method, and teachers use non-verbal means of communication that help children make sense of the words, which resembles mime, gesture, and context to elicit the meaning as in the Direct Method (Richards

and Rodgers, 2001).

As for roles of teachers in the Natural Approach, they have two tasks – to provide comprehensible and appropriate input for the learners, and to create friendly and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). According to Doron (2010), the teachers in the HDEE method have the same tasks – to praise children for their success (and create a friendly atmosphere) and to provide a range of activities that are fun to the learners. Teachers come to the programme from a variety of backgrounds, which means that it is not actually necessary to have a college degree in English teaching, but only a sufficient level of written and spoken English, and love for children. Teachers who were not previously trained usually enjoy the training, and interaction with children comes naturally to them, while teachers who were previously trained for a job in the traditional education face many challenges. Some of these challenges are that they have to forget about their attitude of the authoritative teacher, and be ready to sit with children on the floor, crawl, play games, and act, which they would normally consider foolish. They should also get adjusted to the programme that uses positive reinforcement instead of tests, homework, and correcting mistakes all the time.

The roles of learners are also similar to the ones described in the design of the Natural Approach. In the HDEE method, the learners are not asked to speak at all at the beginning (and those under two cannot speak anyway). They should first listen to the language, get used to it and soak it up, and start with oral production when they are ready, and most likely they will have the desire to join the interesting activities (Doron, 2010). As it can be seen from the description of the HDEE courses and the principle of building on success, the older the learners are, the more they are being taught, and the knowledge builds up on the previously acquired knowledge. The Natural Approach also recognises the development of the learner. Learners fall into three categories depending on the stage of their linguistic development namely *pre-production*, *early-production*, and *speech-emergent* stage (Krashen and Terrel, 1983, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Although not mentioned in the Natural Approach, the roles of parents are very important in the HDEE programme. Doron (2010) says that parents have to become familiar with the importance of repeated home hearing system, because they are the ones who should play tapes to children and encourage them to listen to English at home, and try to replicate the supportive atmosphere of the classroom. Also, early courses (*Baby's Best Start* and *English for Infants*) include obligatory presence of a caregiver, and very often parents improve their knowledge of English by participating in classes with children. However, Doron (2010) admits that many

HDEE teachers are struggling with parents who tend to be critically minded when it comes to knowledge of their children. Therefore, she explains that parents have to realize at the beginning of the programme that reinforcement should be provided only by the teacher when in class, and that parents should break their natural tendency to correct or criticize.

The materials in HDEE classes are adapted to children's way of learning about the world through their organs of sense, since their abstract thinking is not as developed as that of adults (Kovács, 2009, as cited in Doron, 2010). Therefore, the children in HDEE method learn by using lots of visual aids and realia. Also, listening to the tapes has one of the most important roles in the method, because it is used in the background home hearing and home immersion system, which aids acquisition of correct language patterns and proper intonation. Krashen and Terrel (1983, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001) use the same idea of the role of materials in their approach, encouraging the use of realia and pictures, and stressing the importance of games in the classroom.

## 2.5. Critical Evaluation of the Cognitive, Linguistic, and Affective Aspects of the HDEE Method

Being a method that uses a holistic approach towards learners, the HDEE provides a complete theory of second language acquisition in a mother-tongue-like manner by considering cognitive, linguistic, and affective components, and primarily advocates the superiority of children over adults in all three aspects. When Brown (2000) compares first and second language acquisition in children and adults, he observes the differences in terms of neurological, phonological, cognitive, linguistic, and affective considerations. For the purpose of this paper, the features of the HDEE method will be critically analysed within the same categories as in Brown (2000), only with neurological and phonological features being placed into the category of the cognitive ones. Besides the analysis of the basic features of the method and presenting opinions of the linguists that either support or question Doron's ideas, the emphasis will also be put on the evidence that proves that adults can achieve the same results that should be obtained by attending the HDEE courses in childhood.

### 2.5.1. Critical Evaluation of the Cognitive Aspects of the HDEE Method

The features of the HDEE method that deal with the cognitive domain are mainly based on Doman's method that promotes the idea of teaching children as early as possible. Doron (2010) follows the theory about creation of neural pathways very early in life, the theory of the

child's cognitive processes that allow him effortless acquisition, as well as the conclusions about child's biological advantage in successful imitation of foreign language accent and pronunciation. Therefore, she assumes that it would be justified to apply these findings to her English learning programme. Although not explicitly mentioned by Doron, the assumptions of children's superiority over adults in the second language acquisition are based on the critical period hypothesis, i.e. on the effects of brain and cognitive maturation on the process and outcome of the second language acquisition. However, this issue is debated in the literature, with many research results contradicting one another. Therefore, the question about optimal age for the beginning of the second language exposure and education when cognitive factors are taken into consideration remains uncertain. In this chapter, different opinions on the existence of the critical period will be presented, followed by an analysis of the previously mentioned assumptions made by Doron.

According to Brown (2000), the critical period hypothesis was initially based on the findings about first language acquisition. Since young children can relearn their mother tongue in case of a brain injury, and the adults cannot, the idea of a natural ability of children to acquire their mother tongue influenced the thought that the same is also valid for the second language acquisition. The ability supposedly ends at puberty, and makes it harder for adult learners to be as successful as children are. According to Johnson and Newport (1989), the critical period hypothesis proposed by Lenneberg (1967, as cited in Johnson and Newport, 1989) actually consists of two hypotheses, namely *the exercise hypothesis* and *the maturational state hypothesis*. While both hypotheses agree on the existence of the critical period for the first language acquisition, the difference between them is in the predictions they make for the second language acquisition. It is claimed in *the exercise hypothesis* that once a person acquires the first language in the childhood, the ability to learn any other language later in life is always available, and in *the maturational state hypothesis*, it is assumed that all the language learning has to begin in the childhood in order to be successful. What actually comes out of these two hypotheses is the question whether children have the superior capability for the second language acquisition, or whether children and adults are equal.

In their study of the influence of age on the second language acquisition, Johnson and Newport (1989) present their findings based on the experiment done on the 46 native Korean and Chinese speakers between the ages of 3 and 39, who had lived in the US between 3 or 26 years by the time of testing. Their final conclusion is that there is a very strong advantage in the ultimate proficiency in English for the subjects that arrived earlier over the subjects that arrived

later, which supports the existence of the critical period. Their study is also very comprehensive, and besides testing only the language proficiency by means of various tests, they also take affective, sociolinguistic, and environmental factors into consideration, as well as the length of the exposure. Their first finding is that the subjects who arrived in the US before the age of 7 reached native-like performance in the test, and those that arrived after that age show a linear decline in performance up through puberty. Their second finding is that the subjects who arrived in the US after puberty showed poorer language knowledge on average, but that their performance did not continue to decline as they became older. There were also individual differences in performance among the late-arriving subjects, which was not found by those that arrived early. Their third finding is that attitudinal, environmental, sociolinguistic variables, as well as the length of exposure alone are insufficient to explain proficiency, but that they are significant only if the age of arrival is taken into consideration. Finally, the conclusion made by Johnson and Newport (1989) is that critical period for second language acquisition does exist in the form of a gradual decline in performance after certain age, but that this does not happen suddenly at some age point around puberty, as it is suggested in *the maturational state hypothesis*, but approximately at the age of 7. The study by Oyama (1978, as cited in Johnson and Newport 1989) also shows that the age of arrival is the only significant predictor of the ultimate language attainment, and that other factors do not show such a strong correlation with declining proficiency through age if they are taken into consideration without the age of the arrival.

Although there are arguments that the earlier the exposure to the second language begins, the better proficiency will be achieved, and that there is actually a period in life after which it is harder to reach native-like proficiency, there are studies, such as the one by Bialystok and Hakuta (1999), that challenge such assumptions. Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) claim that there is a null hypothesis in a relationship between age and language acquisition ability, which means that the learners of all ages are able to achieve native-like proficiency.

First of all, Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) argue that although both informal observation and empirical studies confirm that children are better language learners than adults, they do not take into consideration that they are exceptions to this rule, and that late learners are sometimes shown to perform just as well as the early learners. Similarly, Hatch (1978) mentions the existence of so called "non-learners" who simply do not acquire the second language as easy and as effortlessly as the others, although they are normal and healthy children in any other aspect.

Secondly, McLaughlin (1992) claims that the ideas that children learn a second language

quickly and easily due to brain flexibility, and that the younger the child, the more skilled he is in the second language acquisition, are myths. Newport (1990, as cited in McLaughlin 1992) explains that the biological advantage of children is being challenged, and that it is being argued that psychological and social factors are those that support young learners.

Also, it is claimed in some studies, e.g. by Snow & Hoefnagel-Hoehle (1978, as cited in McLaughlin, 1992) that adults and adolescents actually perform better than children under controlled conditions. McLaughlin (1992) explains that although some researchers argue that younger is better when it comes to the age of onset of second language acquisition, this conclusion cannot be supported in the school settings. Namely, Stern, *et. al.* (1975, as cited in McLaughlin, 1992) and Florander and Jansen (1968, as cited in McLaughlin, 1992) have proven that after 5 years of second language exposure, older children were better second language learners. However, McLaughlin (1992) argues that this advantage might be due to a focus on grammar in which older learners are more skilled. On the other hand, he claims that the same results are also obtained in French immersion programs in Canada, where there was little focus on formal grammar, and where those that began immersion program later performed equally or better than those that began in the kindergarten.

In addition, Harmer (2007) claims that it is a myth that young children learn faster and more effectively than other age groups, and that research shows (e.g. Yu, 2006, as cited in Harmer, 2007) that older children (from about age of 12) seem to acquire almost all the aspects of the second language far better than the younger ones, except from pronunciation. Harmer (2007) also claims that older children might be more successful, especially in school settings, due to their increased cognitive abilities, and that although young children achieve considerable competence in bilingual surroundings, older learners are more effective in learning situations. In addition, the research by Lightbown and Spada (2006, as cited in Harmer, 2007) shows that older learners can indeed reach high level of second language proficiency.

However, it has to be noted that the claims and results that speak in favor of older children and adults mostly refer to the process of learning itself, usually in the school settings, and what is actually being aimed at with the early beginning of the instruction is the eventual attainment of second language proficiency, i.e. the end of the process and its final outcome.

From this point of view, Johnson and Newport (1989) claim that contradictory research results that sometimes show the advantage of adults and sometimes the advantage of children can be resolved if a difference is made between early stages of learning and the final attainment. They explain that although adults and older children do initially show significant advantage at



both phonology and syntax and seem to be moving more quickly towards proficiency, their advantage does not last for long. Although children might be slower at the beginning, they catch up very soon. The same conclusion is made by Krashen *et. al.* (1979), who suggest three generalizations about age, rate, and ultimate attainment: 1) adults make faster progress through early stages of language development, 2) older children tend to acquire faster than younger children, but 3) those who begin with a natural exposure to the second language early in childhood usually achieve higher proficiency than those that begin later, which means that older learners have the advantage in the rate of acquisition, and that younger learners are better when it comes to final attainment.

However, even these generalizations are being questioned, for example by Birdsong and Mollis (2001, as cited in Schouten, 2009), who have conducted a study as an answer to the one by Johnson and Newport (1989). They came to the results that contradict the assumption that it is impossible for the late learners to achieve native-like proficiency. According to Schouten (2009), Birdsong and Mollis substituted Chinese and Korean for Spanish speakers, but used the same testing as Johnson and Newport. While only one subject who arrived to the US after puberty in the Johnson and Newport's study achieved the score of 92 % of accuracy in the proficiency test, in the Birdsong and Mollis' study thirteen subjects achieved the same result. Therefore, Birdsong and Mollis concluded that the study by Johnson and Newport cannot be taken as a strong evidence for the existence of the critical period, since the critical period is supposed to be applicable to everyone, regardless of their first language.

Doron, as said, does not explicitly refer to the existence of the critical period, but her assumptions of the child's superiority over adults are based on the theory of creation of neural pathways early in life, on the child's cognitive processes that allow him effortless acquisition, and on the child's biological advantage in successful imitation of foreign language accent and pronunciation. However, all these assumptions are encompassed by the critical period hypothesis, and since critical period hypothesis is so strongly debated, the same goes for the assumptions that are followed by Doron.

Doron (2010), as said, recognized the importance of early brain stimulation and inclusion of the process of second language acquisition into it, and concluded that the best results in the acquisition of English can be achieved if a child starts learning as early as possible, preferably at 3 months of age. Brown (2000) claims that many studies were taken to determine the role of the brain development in the second language acquisition, i.e. to determine whether the maturation of the brain constrains second language acquisition. While Doron holds the belief that children

are superior to adults and are more likely to achieve native-like proficiency due to their brains still developing, the effects of maturation of the brain on successful (and native-like) second language acquisition are being questioned.

First of all, Brown (2000) mentions the process of lateralization, i.e. the process of assigning different functions to the left or right hemisphere in the brain. Since this process is still going on during the childhood, the children have the ability to recover from a brain injury that affects left hemisphere (where centres for language and speech are mostly located) more successful than the adults can, by relocating linguistic functions to the right hemisphere. It implies that the finished process of lateralization in adults impedes successful and complete acquisition, and that children acquire easily due to brain plasticity, especially when it comes to acquisition of native-like accent Scovel (1969, as cited in Brown, 2000).

However, when studying neurological processes that are involved in the second language acquisition, the role of the right hemisphere of the brain also has to be mentioned, because it is concerned with the use of language learning strategies by learners who begin learning second language later in life, and who might benefit from it (Brown, 2000). In addition, Walsh and Diller (1979) claim that language-analyzing processes in the brain are long-term, and they are not likely to turn off at the certain age. They also claim that although the consolidation of neural connections in the brain at certain periods in early childhood explains the difficulty for older learners to acquire some aspects of language easily, these stages should not be perceived as critical stages, but only as developmental ones. In these stages, the learning process is only different, not impossible, and in certain aspects of language, except from maybe pronunciation, later developmental stages are better (Walsh and Diller, 1979).

Overall, it cannot be simply claimed that the early second language instruction is completely necessary for second language proficiency, especially because they are cases of adults who managed to acquire native-like accent, although these cases are rare (Brown, 2000). Scovel (1982, as cited in Brown, 2000) also claims that study of the brain only cannot resolve the issues in the second language teaching.

Secondly, from Doron's point of view, cognitive processes that allow children effortless first language acquisition can be used for the successful second language acquisition. Brown (2000) explains that the age effects for the second language acquisition from the point of view of the critical period hypothesis seem to occur when a child becomes capable of abstract thinking, and overcomes the period of learning from experience and perception. These the types of learning activities that are considered to be effective when it comes to language acquisition (and

are used in the HDEE classrooms) (Brown, 2000).

On the one hand, Brown (2000) explains that children acquire languages successfully without formal grammar explanations (i.e. they make rules inductively), and are not aware that they are actually learning. On the other hand, Ausubel (1964, as cited in Brown, 2000) claims that adults actually benefit from deductive explanations (although their success then depends e.g. on the teacher), and that successful adult second language learners are very much aware of the learning process they are going through.

Besides considerations of the nature of learning in children and adults, Brown (2000) also discusses the construct of equilibration, i.e. the process in the cognition of a child when it is moved from the state of doubt or disequilibrium to the state of certainty or equilibrium. According to Brown (2000), children tend to succeed in the second language acquisition because language and cognition should be combined to reach the final equilibrium. In this case, adults have a disadvantage - they might be overwhelmed by the second language and discouraged from learning step by step as a child would.

Another reason that favors children in the process of second language acquisition is a distinction between rote and meaningful learning (Ausubel 1964, as cited in Brown, 2000). While it seems that children use rote learning, they actually repeat, practice, and imitate in a context and for a particular purpose, and therefore meaningfully. On the other hand, adults are thought to have a better ability of rote learning, and this is the way how they are usually taught in a second language classroom (Brown, 2000). However, Ausubel (1964) claims that both children and adults actually do not have much use from meaningless rote learning, but since many classrooms nowadays use rote learning methods, it turns out that a child's learning is meaningful and that adult's learning is not. Ausubel (1964) then concludes that the adults would be more successful if their learning is made meaningful.

Thirdly, concerning the superiority of children in successful imitation of foreign language accent and phonology, most of the linguistic findings in this area support the fact that the earlier the child begins exposure to a second language, the more native-like accent he will attain (Asher and Garcia, 1969 and Oyama, 1976, as cited in McLaughlin, 1992). However, even in this case, when cognitive and neurological considerations speak in favour of young children, there are many different opinions about the role of native-like accent in the second language proficiency.

On the one hand, Walsh and Diller (1981, as cited in Brown, 2000) claim that pronunciation belongs to lower-order processes that are dependent on neural circuits in the brain that are established very early, and therefore it is harder to acquire them successfully after

childhood. On the other hand, they also claim that foreign accents can be successfully overcome with proper instruction and naturalistic environment later in life. Hopp and Schmid (2011) even claim that acquiring a language from birth does not automatically guarantee native-like proficiency, and that late acquisition does not necessarily prevent it. Namely, they have taken a study of comparison of second language learners and first language attriters, i.e. people who were born and lived in one language environment and then moved to another place where different language was spoken. The attriters acquired the second language, and although the pronunciation of their first language was still better than of those who learned their first language as a second language, they lost the native-like proficiency in pronunciation due to a long exposure to the second language.

Putting all this aside, the question about the role of pronunciation in ultimate language proficiency is answered by Brown (2000:59), who claims that "pronunciation of a language is not by any means the sole criterion for acquisition, nor is it really the most important one."

Therefore, although Doron's idea that acquisition of phonological patterns of English should begin as early as possible is supported in the research, there is evidence that the achievement of the same result is possible for the older learners. However, pronunciation and accent are not seen as the most important factors in determining the language proficiency, and the higher-order language processes, such as semantic relations, require more mature neurological functions (Brown, 2000).

Overall, the assumption that after the age of twelve or thirteen people become incapable of successful second language learning is incorrect. According to Brown (2000), the differences between adults and children have to be reviewed by considering all the neurological, phonological, cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors. When it comes to the HDEE method, although it is primarily based on the child's biological advantages, it does take these other factors into consideration, especially the affective ones.

### 2.5.2. Critical Evaluation of the Linguistic Aspects of the HDEE Method

When it comes to the aspects of the HDEE method that fall into the category of the linguistic domain, the issues that will be dealt with include Doron's view of the process of language acquisition. It has already been described how Suzuki's mother-tongue approach influenced Doron to apply the same approach to second language acquisition, i.e. to teach English inspired by the natural process of mother tongue acquisition, and, ideally, by paralleling

it.

First, it is important to sum up shortly Helen Doron's mother-tongue approach. It starts with a child listening to audio material with songs, nursery rhymes, conversations, etc. repeatedly, at least two times a day. These sounds are first unconsciously absorbed, and then consciously imitated in the class, and shortly afterwards understood through flashcards, realia, games, interaction, etc. In addition, children are constantly being praised and encouraged in their attempts to speak, and all the acquisition takes place in comfortable and fun surroundings. This is called the mother tongue approach to second language acquisition because it follows the same pattern of hearing, absorbing, imitating, and understanding as in the child's mother tongue acquisition ([http://www.helendoron.com/arch\\_early\\_english\\_learning\\_2.php](http://www.helendoron.com/arch_early_english_learning_2.php)). In addition, since babies are being praised and rewarded by their parents when they try to speak, this part is also imitated in the HDEE method, and serves as an encouragement to the child to do this even more.

Doron (2010) justifies her idea of the mother-tongue approach by the idea that children who start learning a new language early apply the same techniques used for mother tongue acquisition. In addition, Doron (2010) stresses the importance of the silent period and natural order of skills, as well as of the avoidance of explicit grammar teaching. The same arguments that Doron uses to make analogies between the first and second language acquisition are also summarized by Stern (1970, as cited in Brown), and they are described as arguments that "have cropped up from time to time to recommend a second language teaching method on the basis of first language acquisition" (Brown, 2000:39). Although Brown (2000) claims that there are flaws in each of these assumptions, it could be argued that some of them do make sense for the HDEE method. However, some of these arguments are questionable, and they will be discussed in this chapter.

In addition, the mother-tongue approach also resembles the Natural Approach developed by Krashen and Terrell in many ways, and therefore it would be justified to draw analogies between the two approaches when considering the linguistic features. Since Krashen and Terrell's ideas have been criticised, some of this critique can also be applied to the HDEE method. For this reason, the linguistic features of the HDEE method will be analysed within the framework of the Natural Approach, adding the objective of the HDEE method and other special features of the method to it.

The objective of the HDEE method is to enable the learners to attain native-like proficiency in English, i.e. to achieve bilingualism in the child's mother tongue and English, provided that the education starts early enough.

First of all, since the background home hearing system requires listening to the tapes as often as possible, at least two times a day for about 20 minutes ([http://www.helendoron.com/arch\\_early\\_english\\_learning\\_2.php](http://www.helendoron.com/arch_early_english_learning_2.php)), the achievement of the bilingualism then mostly depends on the child and his parents. Namely, Harmer (2007) claims that a considerable amount of the exposure to the language is needed, because without it there is no chance of acquisition. Besides, Lightbown (1985, as cited in Brown, 2000) claims that native-like or near native-like proficiency cannot be achieved in only an hour a day.

Secondly, Clark (2000) claims that children will become bilingual when there is a real need for communication in the second language, and that exposure itself is not enough for acquisition. According to Clark (2000) there also has to be a real wish to communicate with the native speakers of the target language. On the one hand, it is not questionable whether lessons in the HDEE programme satisfy the child's need to communicate in English in order to acquire it. On the other hand, the problem might be whether approximately two lessons per week, 45-90 minutes, depending on the course ([http://helendoron.com/nucu/no\\_29/files/assets/basic-html/page10.html](http://helendoron.com/nucu/no_29/files/assets/basic-html/page10.html)), are enough, in comparison to bilingualism that is achieved when two languages are spoken at home or at school, and whether it is possible then to achieve the native-like proficiency only by attending the HDEE courses.

While it could be claimed that the HDEE method provides a plausible way to achieve the bilingual state by imitating the mother tongue acquisition, the question is whether all the children who attend the HDEE program really become bilingual, i.e. whether they are on the near-native level of proficiency when their age is taken into consideration.

When it comes to the theory of language learning, the HDEE method mainly follows Krashen's idea that the second language should be acquired, not learned, in order to be used spontaneously and naturally. The natural second language acquisition implies that a language is acquired unconsciously, i.e. that the learners just pick up language from comprehensible input, with no explicit learning of grammar rules (Harmer, 2007). While Krashen's view implies that only comprehensible input is enough for the attainment of the communicative competence (Harmer, 2007), the focus in the HDEE method is not only on the input, but also on the use of language and clarifying the meaning during the classes. However, what might be questionable is whether second language acquisition is unconscious, and whether there should be a complete avoidance of learning of the explicit rules.

Concerning the role of consciousness in language acquisition, there are different opinions on whether processes such as noticing are essential for the acquisition to take place. While

Schmidt (1990) claims that it is impossible to learn anything through subliminal perception, and that noticing is necessary for the input to become intake, he also claims that it is not clear whether noticing itself is always a conscious process (Schmidt, 1993, as cited in Harley, 1993). However, the question is then how children acquire their first language with no conscious effort, and the same question remains for simultaneous bilingual acquisition, because the bilinguals are, as Brown (2000:67) claims, "learning two first languages".

In addition, the question about implicit acquisition versus conscious understanding of the rules in a language is also a part of the discussion about the role of consciousness (Schmidt, 1990). When it comes to differences between children and adults, McLaughlin et al. (1983, as cited in Schmidt 1990) claim that children learn grammar through their attempts to communicate, and Schmidt (1983, as cited in Schmidt, 1990) claims that adults might not be able to learn this way. However, he also claims that the adults are still capable of incidental learning when it is demanded from them in the task. On the other hand, children notice information even when it is not demanded from them in the task (Schmidt, 1990), and the explanation for such phenomenon might be the fact that children have less control over their attention due to their strong awareness of the environment, and cannot avoid noticing, which makes them acquire grammar unconsciously. Also, very young children are incapable of making judgments about grammaticality, i.e. they are not aware of explicit grammar rules (Brown, 2000). At the same time, conscious paying attention to language is necessary for adults to acquire rules of grammar that usually would not be noticed by them, as they would by children (Schmidt, 1990).

Therefore, when it comes to the HDEE method, the idea of natural, unconscious acquisition, with no explicit grammar teaching does make sense, because whether consciously or not, children do pick up rules from input, and teaching young children grammar would make no sense because they are incapable of such abstract thinking. However, Harley (1993:65) claims that "some level of awareness is necessary for second language learning", and that "even children may benefit from age-appropriate metalinguistic information that is aimed at a relatively high level of understanding". In this case it can be concluded that there should not be a complete rejection of mentioning any grammar rules to children whatsoever, as Krashen suggested (Brown, 2000), but that grammar should be introduced to children at an appropriate time and in an appropriate way.

In the HDEE method, as said, the basic grammar structures are introduced to children in the course called *Botty the Robot teaches you English* (age 7 to 11). It is appropriate and still natural, because by that time children already show meta-awareness of language (according to

Hatch, 1978 even very young bilingual children, e.g. at the age of two, show amazing meta-awareness of language). However, when it comes to the acquisition of grammar, children should not be seen as superior to adults. While children learn intuitively, the adults can benefit from a different approach, namely by using their "full cognitive capacities" (Brown, 2000:51). In addition, Ausubel (1964) claims that the principles used by natural methods are counterproductive for older learners and that they can indeed benefit from deductive grammar teaching. In addition, the process of inductive discovery of rules in children is a long process, and the transferability to communication is impossible until the correct discoveries are made (Ausubel, 1964).

Overall, the natural acquisition in the HDEE method seems supportive of the attainment of the natural and spontaneous communicative competence, because it includes both children's natural abilities to learn the second language like the first, and the introduction of grammar at an appropriate time. However, if the goal is the achievement of such competence, adults are also able to achieve it. Although they might not have the advantage in terms of the ability to pick up language like children do, Brown (2000:280) claims that "instruction in conscious rule learning and other types of form-focused instruction (...) can indeed aid in the attainment of successful communicative competence in a second language".

Both Krashen (1982, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001) and Doron (2010) believe that the similar order of development occurs in children learning their first language and in second language learners. However, while Krashen's theory is directed to all second language learners (Brown, 2000), Doron focuses only on the second language acquisition paralleling the first language acquisition in children. What is meant in Krashen's theory is a natural and predictable order of acquisition of language rules in all language learners (Brown, 2000), and the same idea can be found in the HDEE method, together with the idea that there should also be a natural order of acquisition of skills.

Doron mentions the benefits of paralleling the first and second language acquisition in children, or at least the process of second language learning that occurs when a mother tongue is not completely developed – which is, according to Clark (2000), by the age of 6. Doron (2010) claims that in this case children use natural techniques from the mother tongue acquisition and apply them to the second language acquisition. This idea is supported by Goodz (1994, as cited in Clark, 2000), who claims that language development of bilingual children follows the same pattern of development as seen in monolingual children. It is also supported by Clark (2000:183), who claims that "even young children who are learning a second language bring all



of the knowledge about language learning they have acquired through developing their first language.” In addition, Brown (2000) claims that the research mostly supports the idea that cognitive and linguistic processes in children are similar to the process of the first language acquisition. Also, the second language learning is a process of creative construction, in which errors are mostly developmental, and not caused by the first language interference (Dulay and Burt, 1974, as cited in Brown, 2000).

However, Clark (2000) claims that although almost all children become fluent in their first language, early start does not guarantee the same fluency for the second language, because second language acquisition is as complex as the first language acquisition, with many other variables added to it. Even those who begin learning early in the childhood may always have problems with some aspects of language (Clark, 2000). In addition, Lightbown (1977, as cited in Hakuta, 1986) claims that no matter when a child starts second language acquisition, he will not, generally speaking, follow the same developmental patterns of the first language acquisition.

When it comes to adult second language acquisition, Brown (2000) claims that since they are building their second language knowledge on the foundation of their first language, interference occurs more often than in children. However, Brown (2000) also claims that even adults produce errors that are a significant of the creative construction process of the first language acquisition, so their second language development is similar to the one found in children. In addition, Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) conclude that although adults are more affected by first language interference and they transfer quantitatively more, the nature, i.e. the quality of interference is the same as in children. Although in this case adults seem to be more affected by other factors, and their development is not as natural as in children, Brown (2000) claims that the first language in adults should be seen as a facilitating factor used for coping with any language issues that cannot be overcome by generalization. In addition, Ausubel (1964) claims that it would be unnatural to expect from the adult learners to forget about their previous linguistic knowledge and that the use of the first language can help accelerating their progress through second language development.

Therefore, when it comes to comparison between children and adults, it can be concluded that there is a natural order in language progression for both groups. However, the development of language acquisition in children is more natural in the sense of its closeness to the first language acquisition, and not so much disturbed by first language interference as it is in adults due to their developed cognition. In this case, the idea supported by the HDEE method that the younger the child, the more natural the development and the acquisition techniques would be,

makes sense, because in first language development the success is granted, and it can be concluded that the more similar second language acquisition is to the first, the same success is more likely to be achieved.

Concerning the natural order of the acquisition of skills, the conclusion could be the same – since the HDEE method is oriented towards very young children, it would be unrealistic to expect them to speak, read, and write immediately, because they do not have these skills in their first languages. In case of a child becoming literate in his first language before school, the HDEE method offers the reading and writing programme in the course called *First English for all Children* that starts at the age of 5. However, when it comes to older children and adults who are already literate in their first languages, it would be unnatural to deprive them from reading as a tool of acquisition (Ausubel, 1964). Although Doron (2010) claims that simultaneous acquisition of all skills in the traditional second language teaching causes stress to the learner, Ausubel (1964) claims that possible phonological interference from the first language has to be overcome at the very beginning anyway, and that simultaneous exposure to spoken and written material can be helpful to the learner.

All things considered, children and adults do not learn in the same way, and the teaching methods that are completely applicable to children might not work for adults, but when the goal is comprehension of the second language, adults can still achieve it as equally as children.

Krashen's *Input Hypothesis*, as said, can be recognized in the HDEE method - the idea of the silent period for the second language learner, and the idea of comprehensible input that contains information slightly beyond learner's level that aids negotiation of meaning and comprehension. In the HDEE method, the input is received through background home hearing and once this input is comprehended, it serves as a basis for further acquisition. At the same time, a child is granted a silent period. Also, groups of children in the HDEE classes are usually groups of children with mixed ages and abilities, and the teachers should take care that more advanced students do not get bored, and that less advanced students do not get overwhelmed.

The issues from the literature that appear when analyzing the input of the HDEE method are concerned with the length and characteristics of the silent period, and the role of the quality of input. Also, there is a discussion whether adults can achieve the same results in comprehension and production of the second language by processing the input using the same or different methods than children.

First, when it comes to the idea of the silent period for second language acquisition, both Krashen (1982, as cited in Brown) and Doron (2010) follow the view that the learners should

first listen and then start speaking when they are ready, because it is natural and similar to first language acquisition. The purpose of the silent period is to allow learners to adjust themselves to the second language, instead of pressuring them to start speaking immediately (Doron, 2010). This idea sounds justified, but some issues about it might be questionable.

According to Gibbons (1985, as cited in Ellis, 1994, as cited in Ipek, 2009), the critical period in second language acquisition is nothing else than a state of incomprehension, and therefore it is not very useful for the second language acquisition. When compared to the silent period in first language acquisition, the sounds that are heard from the material in the background home hearing system in the HDEE method are first imitated by children, which matches the imitation, i.e. echoing that can be heard in babies acquiring their mother tongue (Brown, 2000). At this point, this is only a surface imitation, with no semantic, but only phonological value (Brown, 2000). However, Brown (2000) also claims that children very soon start to perceive the importance of meaning, and start paying more attention to deep-structure imitation, and when asked to repeat a sentence, they do not repeat it word by word, but in the way they understand it. In the HDEE method, the transfer from surface to deep-structure imitation is followed in a way that what is heard and absorbed becomes meaningful to children during the lessons. Therefore, the state of incomprehension in the HDEE method does not last for long, and the input that children receive becomes comprehensible, and children become familiar with both form and meaning. However, at this point children are still at the level of comprehension, but, according to Krashen's theory (as cited in Brown, 2000), the speech will appear when learners can comprehend enough (Brown, 2000).

Another issue concerned with the silent period is its length. Brown (2000) argues that while speech may appear quickly by some learners, many of them would rather choose to stay within the silent period. In the HDEE method, this issue is taken care of by positive environment, praise, encouragement, and activities that are appealing to children, which should provide enough motivation for children to start speaking.

The issue of the quality of input encompasses the idea of  $i+1$ , and the idea of roughly tuned input that can be seen in the *caretaker speech* (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). The idea of  $i+1$  is accepted in the HDEE method, and recognizable in the teacher's task to provide enough challenge for all the students, as well as in the characteristic of the method that concerns with the opportunity of children to move forward (building on success). Since it has already been concluded that the comprehensible input only is not enough for the acquisition, this part is not problematic in the HDEE method, because besides input, interaction that happens during the

lessons also plays an important role. However, comprehensible input is essential, and the lack of it may restrain development (Ellis, 1994, McLaughlin, 1987, as cited in Ipek, 2009). Therefore, its role can be hardly disputed, as well as the idea of  $i+1$ , i.e. providing enough challenge for the learners to move forward (Brown, 2000).

The second issue concerning the quality of input in the HDEE method is its success in imitating the roughly tuned input of the *caretaker speech*, which probably is the goal, since the HDEE method tries to imitate mother tongue acquisition as much as possible. However, the analysis of the materials and the observation of the HDEE lessons would be needed to determine it. Nevertheless, the Krashen's proposition of roughly-tuned input is questioned and criticised for its role in the second language acquisition.

Dörnyei (1991) argues that Krashen's idea of the roughly-tuned part of comprehensible input does not serve as a proper guideline for teaching, that output is also important, and that finely-tuned, rather than roughly-tuned input is more useful for the learner. First of all, Swain (1985, as cited in Dörnyei, 1991) noticed that Canadian immersion students, who had been learning French for seven years and had received a lot of language input that was comprehensible to them, did not acquire the target language completely, and still had problems with, e.g. morphology. Therefore, Swain (1985, as cited in Dörnyei, 1991) concluded that output, i.e. language production is also an important feature in the second language. Swain (1985, as cited in Dörnyei, 1991) also adds that students tend to communicate their messages in a way that is not correct or lacks elaboration, but since they still manage to communicate, they do not have the need to polish their speech. What it implies is that the learners need some sort of correction that would make them think about rules of language more and try to use them in their speech production. According to Dörnyei (1991), the similar way of correction can be seen in correcting students' written homework. He explains that what students write is their comprehensible input (i), because it presents their current level of development, and the  $+1$  part is the teacher's correction, which is shown to be very interesting and useful for students. However, in this case, the  $+1$  part is not roughly tuned anymore, but finely tuned, and since it raises students' awareness, and engages them into thinking of how they can be more accurate in their speech production, aids their learning (Dörnyei, 1991). In the HDEE method, children do receive gentle correction if they make a mistake, and it can be concluded that both comprehensible input they receive through audio material, which is roughly tuned, and the output controlled by the teacher, which is finely tuned, follow to accurate and successful speech production.

When it comes to processing of input in adults, some implications can be drawn from the

analysis of the silent period and the input quality. The silent period in the first language acquisition is actually a period of comprehension, and although the first speech that emerges in children is just echoing, meaningful imitation occurs very soon after that, and it is repeated and practiced in a context (Brown, 2000). Therefore, Ausubel (1964) claims that adults could also benefit from meaningful practice during the period of comprehension, instead of just being asked to repeat the surface structure, as it is the case of drill tasks that are used in many classrooms. In addition, since children receive simplified input in a form of the *caretaker speech*, adults could also benefit from a slower rate of speech during the early stages of learning, which would ensure comprehension (Ausubel, 1964).

### 2.5.3. Critical Evaluation of the Affective Aspects of the HDEE Method

Since three of the four fundamental principles of the HDEE method are concerned with the affective domain of the language acquisition (positive reinforcement, building on success, and making learning fun), it can be concluded that this domain is perceived as a very important part of the second language acquisition. The affective features of the HDEE method that are encompassed by these three principles are positive environment in which the learners have no fear, gentle error correction, praise, interesting materials, building a child's self-confidence, holistic and humanistic approach to the learner, and giving students a lot of individual attention . The purpose of such approach in the HDEE method is to build a positive attitude towards language in learners and to engage learners to participate more and to learn more. The goal in the HDEE method is to create the environment similar to the one that the infants acquiring their mother tongue are surrounded with, namely safe, happy, relaxed, and encouraging.

The similar view is presented in *The Affective Filter Hypothesis* by Krashen (1982, as cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001), who also noticed that when learners are relaxed and happy, i.e. when their affective filter is lowered they acquire language more easily. As in the cognitive and linguistic domain, superiority of children in the affective domain is implied, with a special stress on the effortless acquisition in children and perception of a second language as something natural. Also, children are considered less self-conscious than adults are, free of prejudices towards language learning and learning in general, and curious about the world around them (Doron, 2010).

First, it should be mentioned that the effortless and easy second language learning in children is a myth. Hatch (1978) claims that second language learning is a long and difficult

process, and that many children who start learning a second language in an early age when they, for example, move to another country, experience shock, frustration, rejection, and withdrawal. Not all children are the same, and it would therefore be false to assume that second language acquisition in childhood is completely free of any problems. It is worth noting, however, that in the HDEE method, much attention is paid, as said, to the positive and encouraging environment.

The next issue that should be taken into consideration when analysing the affective features of the HDEE method is the view about positive reinforcement, which is similar to the behaviouristic theory of how languages are learned. The language acquisition described by Doron (2010) is assumed to be a process of acquisition of correct and proper use of language, which is perceived by a child as something advisable after the praise, and the child becomes more likely to repeat it. The errors are treated by the teacher in a gentle way, and when a child corrects himself and produces an accurate utterance, he is again praised (Doron, 2010).

However, according to Ipek (2009), this view has been criticised because only regular and routine aspects can be learned through reinforcement. Also, it is suggested in the behaviouristic view that only the environment provides the language for the language learner, which does not explain the creative construction process when both first and second language learners produce utterances they could not have heard (Ipek, 2009). In the HDEE method, only the behaviouristic view of positive reinforcement is mentioned, and it is not known whether there are other ways of dealing with acquisition of more complex structures in a language, and how is the creative construction process of a learner being treated.

Another problem that has to do with positive reinforcement is the use of praise for everything that a learner does or says well. In the HDEE method, praising is taken from the process of mother tongue acquisition in which parents react positively to every word or sentence that is correctly or appropriately used by the child who is learning to speak. It builds child's self-confidence and is completely opposite to overt correction that is present in many traditional second language classrooms (Doron, 2010).

However, Harmer (2007) warns against over-praise and says that, although students respond well to it, it may create "praise junkies" (Kohn, 2001, as cited in Harmer, 2007). Kohn (2001, as cited in Harmer, 2007) claims that praise is actually counter-productive, and makes children less secure, because children might start depending too much on the opinions of others about their work, and lose their feeling for self-evaluation. On the other hand, Harmer (2007) mentions that children have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher, and that this is one of the ways they learn.

The humanistic approach to language teaching used in the HDEE method has also been criticised. Harmer (2007) mentions that some critics of the humanistic teaching suggest that paying too much attention to the affective issues in learning may mean that cognitive and intellectual development are being neglected. However, this claim could hardly refer to the HDEE method, because a lot of attention is paid to successful acquisition, and making students feel good about themselves is seen as one of the supportive factors. In addition, since the method is oriented towards very young children, personal identity and emotions should not be ignored, because, according to Brown (2000), very young children are highly egocentric, and as they grow up they are becoming more self-conscious, and they need protection. Nevertheless, Harmer (2007) says it is obviously better for the learners to have positive rather than negative attitude towards the way they are learning.

For other aspects of the HDEE method that are concerned with the affective domain and humanistic teaching, such as building a positive environment for learning, using interesting materials, games and activities, child-centred teaching, and a lot of individual attention, it is hard to find any critique, either in the literature or by using common sense.

However, the question that is open to discussion is whether the characteristics of children that are concerned with the affective domain make them better language learners than adults. On the one hand, adults might have a negative attitude and inhibition towards language due to previous bad experience, they might be more self-conscious and likely to be embarrassed, and they might find it harder to identify themselves with a second language, as opposed to children (Doron, 2010). On the other hand, Brown (2000) claims that if mature cognition of adults is seen as a problem in the second language acquisition, than other variables are allowing some adults to be very successful language learners, and interestingly, these variables lie in most cases in the affective or emotional domain.

### 3. Introduction to Research

In order to evaluate the HDEE method critically, theoretical discussion of certain aspects of the HDEE method is certainly not enough. It is necessary, therefore, to investigate further, and to see how the whole idea of the method functions in practice, i.e. in one of the HDEE Learning Centres. Although the HDEE method has existed for over 25 years, there are hardly any attempts of the evaluation of its effectiveness. However, one example of such attempt found in the literature is the outline of a doctoral dissertation by Rokoszewska (2006), in which she explains

that the proficiency of the HDEE learners will be checked through a range of test, and that conclusions about the effectiveness of the method will be driven from these results. Obviously, for the trustworthy evaluation of the HDEE method, such comprehensive and longitudinal study is needed. However, the aim of this paper is not to check whether the HDEE method is effective, but to analyze and evaluate features of its approach that are considered problematic in the SLA studies in general. These issues have already been discussed in the theoretical part, and the conclusions about them will now be complemented with the results obtained from this inquiry.

### 3.1. Aim

The aim of this paper is to present findings from the research that was conducted among the parents of children who are attending the HDEE courses. In this part of the paper, the parents' evaluations of the different characteristics of the HDEE method and children's proficiency in English will be analysed and discussed, as well as the impact of the HDEE method to school success. The research part will also provide additional information about cognitive, linguistic, and affective features of the HDEE method by analysing how the issues presented in the theoretical background are actualized in practice.

The research questions that will be answered in this part are:

- 1) How do parents evaluate their children's proficiency in English and how does this evaluation correlate with children's grades at school?
- 2) Is there any difference in parents' evaluation of children's proficiency in English between the groups that started attending the HDEE courses before and after the age of six?
- 3) Is there any difference in parents' evaluation of children's perception of English as natural between the groups that started attending the HDEE classes before and after the age of six?
- 4) How does children's proficiency in English evaluated by parents correlate with the factors that lie outside the HDEE classes, such as the exposure to English through the media and parents' doing English with children at home? How do these factors correlate with grades at school?
- 5) How do parents evaluate their children's fondness of the HDEE lessons?
- 6) How do the affective factors of the HDEE method that are concerned with the holistic approach to children correlate with children's proficiency in English and with their school grades?



7) How do parents evaluate the impact of the HDEE method to their children's success in English at school?

Based on the previous discussion on research findings on the issues underlying the approach of HDEE method, the following hypotheses are assumed:

1) There is no significant difference in English proficiency between learners who started attending the HDEE method before and after the age of six, because both groups have equal chances of successful language acquisition in all aspects.

2) English should be equally perceived as natural both by those that started attending the HDEE classes before and after the age of 6, because the HDEE method with its unique features enables natural acquisition, and at the same time it is adjusted to the cognitive needs of different age groups. However, parents' evaluation of the naturalness of English in early-learners should be slightly higher than in late-learners, because of the closeness to the mother tongue acquisition.

3) There should be no significant correlation between children's English proficiency evaluated by parents and factors that lie outside the HDEE method, because the method alone provides input, meaningfulness, interaction, and correction that are all together necessary for the successful second language acquisition.

4) Children should have a very positive attitude towards the HDEE lessons, the method should have a role in the child's success in English at school, and the affective features of the HDEE method that are concerned with the holistic approach should be positively correlated with the parents' estimation of the children's English proficiency and grades at school. The reason for this assumption is the importance of affect in the second language acquisition, and a great effort put on these factors in the HDEE method.

The analysis of the answers to the research questions should provide pieces of information that are necessary for the reanalysis of the issues of early English education and English acquisition through the mother-tongue approach in the HDEE method. In the conclusion of this paper, the theoretical and practical findings will be briefly summarized, and the final critical evaluation of the HDEE method will be made.

### 3.2. Participants

The participants of this research are 36 parents of 36 children who are attending the HDEE courses in the Learning Centre Špansko in Zagreb. The reason why parents were chosen

to be the participants in this research are the strict rules and restrictions when it comes to doing research with children as subjects, and the complexity of information that are asked for in the questionnaire.

However, it should be taken into consideration that the act of evaluating their children might include a certain amount of subjectivity in parents. In addition, since some parents do not speak English, it is questionable how successfully they can evaluate their children's knowledge. However, it is assumed that their evaluation is based on the feedback they receive from the HD teacher or from the teachers at child's school.

All the children are between 7 and 13 years of age, and they are all going to school. As it is evident from Table 1, the majority of children (83.3 %) were exposed to English before the age of six. However, most children (61.1 %) did not start attending the HDEE classes before the age of six as it is recommended. The reason why this age is taken as a distinguishing factor between groups is the idea of the beginning of the second language acquisition when the mother tongue is not yet completely developed, with the process ending around the age of six, as has been stated in the theoretical part.

Table 1. Data about children's age of first exposure to English and age of the HDEE onset

	First exposure to English (N=33)		The age of the HDEE onset (N=36)	
	<6	>6	<6	>6
Frequency	30	3	14	22
Percent	83.3	8.3	38.9	61.1

Children's grades in English at school are grades 2, 4, and 5. As can be seen in Table 2, most children have excellent (61.1%) or very good (13.9%) grades in English. The lowest grade is 2, and only one child has this grade. The reason why some data are missing is the fact that some children do not learn English at school (cf. Appendix 1).

Table 2. Children's grades in English at school (N=28)

Grades at school	Frequency	Percent
2	1	2.8
	40	

4	5	13.9
5	22	61.1

As for parents, 75% of them claim they speak English. Their grades in English that are estimated through their self-evaluation vary between 1 and 5, with an average grade of 3.11 (Table 3). As can be seen in Table 4, most parents evaluate their knowledge with grades 3 and 4, but there are more parents who evaluate their knowledge with negative grade (16.7 %) than those who evaluate their English as excellent (8.3%).

Table 3. Average grade for parents' English (N=36)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Parents' self evaluation of English knowledge	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.21368

Table 4. Frequencies for parents' grades in English

	Frequency	Percent
1	6	16.7
2	3	8.3
3	11	30.6
4	13	36.1
5	3	8.3

### 3.3. Instrument and Procedure

The data for this research was collected by means of a self-made questionnaire (Appendix 1), which was sent to the HDEE Learning Centre Špansko in Zagreb. Fifty copies of the questionnaire were then distributed among the parents of the children who are attending the lessons at the centre. The criterion for selecting the children, i.e. parents, was that children attend

regular school. Forty out of fifty questionnaires were sent back for the analysis, but four of them had to be excluded from the research, because the four children do not yet attend school.

The questionnaire is written in Croatian, and on its first page, there are instructions for parents about filling in information for each part. In the first part of the questionnaire, parents were asked to provide demographic data about their children's first exposure to English and to the HDEE method, and their grades at school. Parents were also asked to circle *yes* or *no* for the question about them speaking English. They also had to evaluate their knowledge of English by using a scale of grades from 1 to 5 that is normally used at schools.

For the second part of the questionnaire, parents were instructed to evaluate their agreement with 19 statements that are concerned with the characteristics of the HDEE method. The scale used for evaluation is a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1- disagree, 2-partially disagree, 3- neither agree nor disagree, 4-agree, 5-fully agree). Statements number 1, 18, and 19 refer to children's opinion about the method, and parents had to evaluate whether their children like attending the HDEE classes, and whether materials used during the lessons and at home are appealing and motivating to children. Statements number 2, 4, 6, and 8 refer to the holistic approach to the learner in the HDEE method, and parents had to evaluate the impact of the HDEE method to children's development in general, to their self-esteem, and to lowering their inhibitions when it comes to speaking. These first two sets of statements are designed to test the application of the affective-holistic features of the method (making learning fun, positive reinforcement, creating non-stressful environment for learning). The statements 3 and 5 are connected with the impact of the HDEE method to the child's success at school. There is no explicit connection between this set of statements and the theory about the HDEE method, but it is assumed that there is a connection between attending the HDEE classes and school success. The statements 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 16 together are aimed at the evaluation of different aspects of proficiency in children. These statements encompass the evaluation of child's fluency in English, vocabulary and grammar knowledge, pronunciation, reading and writing, and comprehension. The statements 11 and 14 are connected with the child's perception of English as natural and similar to the mother tongue acquisition, since one of the aims of the HDEE method is to ensure natural acquisition followed by spontaneity in speech. The statements 15 and 17 are meant for parents' evaluation of children's exposure to English outside the HDEE programme, i.e. at home and through media.

The data was analysed using the SPSS programme, and the methods that were used were descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-test, and correlation.

### 3.4. Results

The first analysis that was performed was the calculation of the mean scores for each statement in the questionnaire by using descriptive statistics. Mean values for all the scores are very high, i.e. very close to the maximum of 5, and all of them are above 3, which indicates that the participants agreed with all statements from the questionnaire in general (see Table 6). In addition, the skewness is negative for each item, which confirms the fact that the participants circled mostly higher values in the Likert scale. As evident from the Table 5, the mean score for the whole questionnaire is 4.26, and relatively small standard deviation suggests the homogeneity of the result. The mode value was 4.21.

Table 5. Total score for all the variables in the questionnaire (N=32)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation
Total score for all the variables in the questionnaire	3.05	5,00	4.26	4.21	.47358

The second analysis that was performed is the descriptive statistic of all the components that make up a scale used for estimation of the child's proficiency in English. The scale is reliable, with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .84. Table 6 shows the descriptives for each component of this scale.

Table 6. Scores for each component of the English proficiency scale<sup>1</sup>

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Speaking	2.00	5.00	4.08	.80623
Vocabulary	2.00	5.00	3.94	.89265
Grammar	2.00	5.00	3.8	.95077
Pronunciation	2.00	5.00	4.11	.91894
Reading and writing	2.00	5.00	4.4	.84714

<sup>1</sup> The components of the English proficiency in English are derived from the items 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 16 in the questionnaire

Comprehension	2.00	5.00	4.53	.77408
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As can be seen from Table 6, mean scores for each component of the English proficiency are quite high which means that parents evaluate their children's English knowledge as very good.

For the purpose of further analysis, the components of the scale for evaluation of the English proficiency (items 7, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 16) were computed into one variable that was labelled *Total opinion on English proficiency*. After this procedure, the descriptive statistics and frequencies were calculated. The result from the descriptives is shown in Table 7, with mean value of 4.15, and standard deviation being quite low (.65101), which indicates the homogeneity of the result.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for the *Total opinion on English proficiency* (N=35)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Total opinion on English proficiency	2.50	5.00	4.15	.65101

Table 8. Frequencies of the scores for the *Total opinion on English proficiency* (N=35)

	2.5	2.83	3.17	3.33	3.5	3.67	3.83	4	4.17	4.33	4.5	4.67	4.83	5
F	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	3	7	3	3	1	2	6
P	2.8	2.8	5.6	2.8	5.6	2.8	5.6	8.3	19.4	8.3	8.3	2.8	5.6	16.7

F-frequency, P-percent

Analysis of frequencies for this data (see Table 8) showed that the score that occurred among the largest percentage of the participants (19.4%) was 4.17. Also, the highest score was 5, and many parents (16.7 %) evaluated their child's proficiency by marking the "strongly agree" (5) in the Likert scale for every statement in the questionnaire that is concerned with the English proficiency. On the other hand, the lowest score of 2.50 occurred by only one participant (2.8%).

Next,

Pearson correlation was used to check the relationship between the *Total opinion on English proficiency* and grade at school. The result is shown in Table 9. Prior to the correlation test, a

preliminary analysis was performed to ensure that there are no violations of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity.

Table 9. Correlation between *Total opinion on English proficiency* and children's grades at school (N=28)

		Total opinion on English proficiency
Grade in English at school	Pearson Correlation	.429*
	Sig.	.023

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As can be seen from Table 9, there is a medium statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables with the  $r = .429$ , and Sig. value of .023 ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore it can be concluded that the higher the evaluation of children's proficiency the higher school grades children have in English.

The next step was the analysis of the difference in the mean scores for each proficiency variable between groups that started attending the HDEE method before and after the age of 6. The reason why for this comparison all the proficiency variables were taken into account instead of the computed *Total opinion on English proficiency* variable was to check out exactly in which aspects of proficiency these groups differ (see Table 10). The groups were compared by using independent-samples t-test, and the results are shown in Table 11. As evident from Table 10, there are small differences in the mean scores for each variable between the two groups. For the group that started attending the HDEE courses after the age of 6, all the aspects of proficiency are evaluated by parents as slightly higher than for the other group, except in the aspect of comprehension.

Table 10. Descriptive statistics for comparison between groups on different aspects of English proficiency

	Child's age at the HDEE onset			
	<6 (N=14)		>6 (N=22)	
	Mean	St. deviation	Mean	St. Deviation
Speaking	3.86	.94926	4.23	.68534

Vocabulary	3.79	1.05090	4.05	.78542
Grammar	3.64	1.00821	3.91	.92113
Pronunciation	4.07	.99725	4.14	.88884
Reading and writing	4.31	.94733	4.45	.80043
Comprehension	4.71	.46881	4.41	.90812

Table 11. T-test results for comparison between groups on different aspects of English proficiency

	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speaking	.1,359	34	.183
Vocabulary	-.848	34	.403
Grammar	-.815	34	.421
Pronunciation	-,204	34	.840
Reading and writing	-.490	33	.627
Comprehension	1.323	32.94	.195

As can be seen in Table 11, the independent t-test revealed no statistically significant differences between the two groups ( $p > 0.05$ ).

The next step was to determine whether there is a significant difference between the two groups in terms of perception of English language as natural. For this purpose, parents' evaluations of the statements 11 and 14 in the questionnaire were considered. These were computed into one variable labelled *Total opinion on English as natural*, and the descriptives were ran to find out the mean value for the variable (Table 12). After that, the t-test was conducted to compare mean scores on this variable for the groups that started attending the HDEE courses before and after the age of 6. The results from the t-test are showed in Table 13.



Table 12. Comparison in evaluation of perception of English as natural between groups

	Child's age at the HDEE onset			
	<6 (N=13)		>6 (N=22)	
	mean	St. Deviation	mean	St. deviation
Total opinion on English as natural	4.03	1.16300	3.93	.82079

As can be seen in the Table 12, the mean score for the group that started attending the HDEE courses before the age of 6 is slightly higher than for the other group. However, standard deviation for this group suggests that this result is less homogenous than for the other group.

Table 13. T-test results for comparison between groups in the perception of English as natural

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total opinion on English as natural	.318	33	.753

The independent t-test (Table 13) showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups in their perception of English as natural ( $p>0.05$ ).

For the purpose of answering the research questions 4) and 6), a set of correlations was performed to determine the relationship of the total evaluation of proficiency and grades at school with the affective factors of the HDEE method concerned with the holistic approach to the learners and factors that lie outside the HDEE method. First, the affective factors of the HDEE method that are concerned with the holistic approach (items 2, 4, 6, and 8) were transformed into one variable labelled *Total affective-holistic factors*. The factors that lie outside the HDEE method (items 15 and 17) were also computed into one variable labelled *Total outside factors*. Two more variables were included into this analysis, namely the school grades and *Total opinion on proficiency*. The aim was to determine whether e.g. higher score on the evaluation of the impact of the outside factors correlates with higher grades at school and vice versa. The results are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Comparison of correlations of *Total affective-holistic factors* and *Total outside factors* with grades at school and total proficiency.

		Total opinion on proficiency	Grade in English at school
Total affective-holistic factors	Pearson Correlation	.664**	.012
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.954
Total outside factors	Pearson Correlation	.388*	.358
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	.067

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As can be seen from Table 14, there is a strong positive correlation between *Total opinion on proficiency* and *Total affective holistic factors* ( $r=.664$ ,  $p<.05$ ). As for the correlation between *Total opinion on proficiency* and *Total outside factors*, it is medium and positively oriented ( $r=.388$ ,  $p<.05$ ). It means that the higher the scores are on the *Total opinion on proficiency*, the higher the scores are on *Total affective holistic factors* and *Total outside factors*. However, no statistically significant correlation was detected between school grades and these two variables, although there is some amount of positive correlation.

The next step was to find out how children perceive the HDEE method, i.e. how parents evaluated their children's fondness of the HDEE classes. First, items 1, 18, and 19 were computed into a new variable labelled *Total children's opinion*, whose mean score would then indicate how children perceive the HDEE method in general. After that, the descriptive statistics were ran, and these results can be seen in Table 15. As it is evident from Table 15, the mean score for this variable is very high (4.45), and standard deviation is slightly low, which indicates a homogeneity of very high scores in the Likert scale given for the children's opinion about the method, according to the parents' evaluation.

Table 15. Scores for the variable *Total children's opinion about the HDEE* (N=36)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Total children's opinion about the HDEE	3.67	5.00	4.55	.45182

The aim of the last analysis that was performed was to find out what parents in general believe about the role that the HDEE method has in children's success at school. First, items 3 and 5 were computed into a new variable labelled *Total opinion on the HDEE impact to school success in English*. After that, the descriptive statistics were ran to determine the mean value for this variable. The result is shown in the Table 16.

Table 16. Descriptives for the variable *Total opinion on the HDEE impact to school success in English* (N=34)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Total opinion on the impact of the HDEE to school success in English	2.00	5.00	4.47	.67354

The mean score for this variable is very high, and standard deviation is quite low, which suggests a homogenous result for the parents' evaluation of the variables in the questionnaire connected with the role of the HDEE method in the school success.

### 3.5. Discussion

As the statistical results show, all the questionnaire items have high mean values. The statements used in the questionnaire are derived from the theory about the HDEE method, they are all positively oriented, and they actually stand for the different expectations that should be achieved by attending the HDEE courses. Since Table 5 shows a reasonably high mean value when all the statements are taken into consideration, and standard deviation is low, it can be concluded that parents unanimously believe that in the HDEE Learning Centre their children are attending, all the expectations from the HDEE method are being successfully met and applied to practice. This also suggests that the method and its principles are recognized as very good among the parents that took part in this research.

The first research question was *How do parents evaluate their children's proficiency in English and how does this evaluation correlate with children's grades at school?*, and the answer to this question can be found by observing the results from Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9. It is evident from Table 6 that parents evaluate their children's English speaking fluency, knowledge of

vocabulary and grammar rules and their application to speech as very high. In addition, parents agree with the statement that English pronunciation of their children is very native-like, that their children can read and write in English well, and that they have no problems following and comprehending the HDEE lessons that are delivered only in English. Therefore, the mean score for the *Total opinion on child's English proficiency* is also very high (Table 7). The frequencies have shown that parents of six children believe that their children's proficiency is at the highest level in all aspects (Table 8).

However, parents' evaluation or opinion should not be taken as a reliable measure for their children's proficiency, because, as said, it might include an amount of subjectivity, and parents themselves are not experts for the evaluation of English proficiency. Also, some of them do not speak English at all or their English is very poor. On the other hand, the significant positive correlation between the children's grades at school and parents' evaluation of proficiency (Table 9) implies that the parents' evaluation is very similar to the evaluation done by the experts (teachers at school). In spite of that, the evaluation of children's English proficiency that was derived from the questionnaire should not be taken as an implication for the effectiveness of the method, but it shows that parents are quite pleased with the results their children achieve by attending the HDEE lessons.

The second research question was *Is there any difference in parents' evaluation of the children's proficiency in English between the groups that started attending the HDEE classes before and after the age of 6?*, and the answer to this question is evident from the groups' comparison on different aspects of English proficiency in Table 10. It has been hypothesised that there would be no significant difference in English proficiency between those that started attending the HDEE method before and after the age of six, and this assumption was confirmed by the t-test (Table 11).

It has been described in the theoretical part that the existence of the critical period hypothesis for the second language acquisition is a much-debated issue, and that the same critique that can be applied to the critical period hypothesis can be applied to the theories about early brain development followed by Doron. The idea that is encompassed by both critical period hypothesis and the theories followed by Doron is that early language learning is crucial for the achievement of the native-like proficiency, especially for the successful imitation of the native-like pronunciation. However, as said in the theoretical part, although early learning has its advantages, there are no biological constraints for older children, adolescents or adult learners to achieve native-like proficiency. The theoretical assumptions are being confirmed by the research

result that shows that the child's age at the onset of the HDEE method makes no difference in the evaluation of the different aspects of proficiency between the two groups.

As for the easy and spontaneous speech production, it has been concluded in the theoretical part that the natural acquisition ensured by the HDEE method is very beneficial for the attainment of high communicative competence, but that the same result can be achieved in older learners by introducing grammar structures to them in an appropriate way. It has also been mentioned that the HDEE method does introduce children to grammar structures, so it explains the similar results in this aspect between the two groups. The research result can also be confirmed by the fact that while younger children have the ability to pick up rules used in the speech, those that started learning the language later have more mature cognition that keeps their speech production at the same level with the younger ones.

When it comes to successful acquisition of vocabulary and grammar structures and their use in the language production, as well as for reading and writing in English, the similar evaluation of these aspects of proficiency between the two groups can again be explained by considering the way in which younger and older children learn. Namely, young children learn vocabulary and grammar intuitively, and it is shown to be successful. However, older children, who operate from the more cognitively developed system due to the familiarity with concepts from their first language, do not necessarily have a disadvantage, but the previous knowledge can actually help them to achieve the same results as the younger ones do. As for reading and writing, the HDEE method sees the simultaneous acquisition of these skills as problematic and as a major source of stress to the learner. However, the children that started attending the HDEE courses after the age of six were actually introduced to reading and writing both in the HDEE centre and at school, while English was new to them at the same time. Nevertheless, according to parents' evaluation, all the children can read and write in English at the age-appropriate level. It could not be determined in this research, however, whether simultaneous acquisition of all four skills caused stress to these learners, but, as said in the theoretical part, once the initial problems are overcome, reading and writing skills are used as powerful tools for further language acquisition.

The issue of the necessity of early exposure to the second language when it comes to the achievement of the native-like pronunciation and accent, as well as a few exceptions to the rule, has been discussed in the theoretical part. Therefore, it could be expected that the group that started attending the HDEE lessons before the age of six would have a significantly better result than the other group. However, the evaluation of the native-likeness in pronunciation between

the two groups yielded two very similar mean scores, and, interestingly, the group that started attending the HDEE courses after the age of six had a slightly better result. However, it should be noted that a majority of children have been exposed to English from an early age, which might explain the similarity between the groups.

The last aspect of the English proficiency that was used to compare groups is comprehension, i.e. children's ability to follow the English-only HDEE lessons. As can be seen from Table 10, the group that started attending the HDEE courses before the age of six has a slightly higher mean score than the other group. This difference could be explained by taking into consideration the fact that these children might be more familiar with the materials that are used in the HDEE classes, and have more experience in following and comprehending lessons in English. On the other hand, the difference between them and the other group is very small and insignificant, which means that older children can also comprehend well.

Overall, the theory shows and the research results confirm the fact that it is actually not crucial and completely necessary for children to begin attending the HDEE courses or start learning English in some other way as early as possible. As evident from the groups' comparison in evaluated proficiency, the children who started attending the HDEE courses before the age of six are equal to children that started attending the HDEE courses after the age of six.

The next research question is *Is there any difference in parents' evaluation of children's perception of English as natural between the groups that started attending the HDEE classes before and after the age of 6?*, and the answer to this question can be found in Table 12 and Table 13. Obviously, there is no significant difference between the two groups in this aspect (see Table 13). However, as it has been hypothesised, there is a slightly higher score for children that started attending the HDEE courses before the age of six (see Table 12).

As for naturalness of English to children, it has been stated earlier that the HDEE method aims at the achievement of this state in learners by allowing them the silent period, and by making the English language acquisition similar to the mother tongue acquisition. The goal is that a child does not perceive English as another school subject that he has to learn, but that the language becomes a part of the child just like the mother tongue, so that it is used spontaneously for the communicative purpose. The perception of English as natural should be achieved when a child is introduced to the language early enough, and the theory confirms that the closeness to the mother tongue acquisition process is beneficial. However, the similar results for the two groups can be explained by taking into consideration the fact discussed earlier that the natural language progression is found in both older and younger learners. In addition, the HDEE method

does take into consideration the cognitive development of a child and introduces, e.g. grammar structures at the time that a child is becoming familiar with the similar concepts in his mother tongue, which ensures naturalness.

All things considered, it is evident from the research results that parents agree with the statements that English is natural to their children, and that it spontaneously appears in their speech, which indicates that the goal of the HDEE method is achieved. Interestingly, although the method advocates an early start in order to achieve the naturalness of the perception of English in children, high result in the group that started attending the HDEE courses later can be explained by observing the principles used in the HDEE.

The next research question is *How does the children's proficiency in English evaluated by parents correlate with the factors that lie outside the HDEE classes, such as the exposure to English through the media and parents' doing English with children at home? How these factors correlate with grades at school?* The result from Table 14 shows the existence of a strong positive correlation between parents' evaluation of children's proficiency and exposure to English from the media and at home. However, the correlation between these factors and children's grades at school is not significant (Table 14), and therefore does not confirm the idea that higher exposure to English from the media or at home are followed by higher grades at school.

It has been hypothesised that the HDEE method provides children with all the components that are necessary for the successful language acquisition (input, meaningfulness, interaction, and correction), and it has been confirmed in the theory that the success can be explained by these factors occurring together. It has also been explained in the theoretical part that the comprehensible input only (e.g. from the media) is important, but it is insufficient for the achievement of proficiency. At the same time, there is a need for interaction in the second language (e.g. with parents, relatives, friends etc.), but if this interaction lacks proper correction, the achievement of the accurate communicative competence fails.

On the one hand, the research results show that those who are highly exposed to English outside the HDEE classes are also evaluated by parents as more proficient, and vice versa. On the other hand, the correlation between these factors and grades at school is insignificant. This inconsistency can be explained by taking into consideration the fact that nowadays all children are highly exposed to English, but it does not automatically guarantee the success in English at school, and high proficiency in general. However, as long as children are involved into interaction in English, and this interaction includes correction, the exposure from outside could be only seen as beneficial. Also, it has been shown in this research that those whose proficiency

is evaluated as high also have very good grades at school in English, but this success does not necessarily have to correlate with the high exposure to English in the media or at home. Therefore, high proficiency is a result of all the factors necessary for successful English acquisition, and all these factors are considered in the HDEE method.

The next research question is *How do parents evaluate their children's fondness of the HDEE classes?*. It can be seen from the result of parents' evaluation in Table 15 that children like attending the HDEE classes, and that interesting and challenging materials used in the HDEE method contribute to the children's fondness of it. This is not surprising, as it has been hypothesised, because the HDEE method puts a lot of effort into making lessons and the whole process of English acquisition as comfortable and fun to the learners as possible. The theory confirms the significant role of affect in the second language acquisition, and therefore it can be concluded that the HDEE method is very likely to influence children's fondness of English, and therefore contribute to the likelihood of the achievement of the very high proficiency.

The research question that follows is *How do the affective factors of the HDEE method that are concerned with the holistic approach to children correlate with the children's proficiency in English and with their school grades?* It can be seen from the results in Table 14 that there is a very strong correlation between the affective-holistic features of the HDEE method and the evaluation of children's English proficiency. This result means that children whose overall development and self-confidence were highly positively influenced by attending the HDEE courses also exhibit a higher level of English proficiency.

However, the correlation between these factors and grades at school is statistically insignificant (Table 14). The lack of correlation between grades at school and the effectuation of the affective-holistic features of the HDEE method in children can be explained by taking into consideration that teachers at school evaluate the English knowledge of children, and not, e.g. their self-confidence. To exemplify it a bit more, a child who has a fear of speaking in front of the others can still achieve very high scores in written tests in English at school. However, it is obvious that the HDEE method does positively influence the development in children and lowers their inhibitions, which are all great characteristics for a learner to have.

On the one hand, high English proficiency is not necessarily present in children who are more self-confident, fearless, or extraverted and vice versa. On the other hand, building the positive attitude towards language by addressing the whole personality of the learner and raising their self-confidence (one of the principles of the HDEE method) is indeed beneficial for reaching the high proficiency, as stated in theory.



The last research question is *How parents evaluate the impact of the HDEE method to their children's success in English at school?*, and the answer to it can be found in Table 16. A very high mean score for the relevant variables indicates a strong opinion of parents that the HDEE method positively influences the child's success in English at school. An interesting case came out while analyzing the parents' responses in the questionnaire - one child (now 13) who has a very low grade at school (2) started attending the HDEE courses at the age of 12. It could be assumed that the parents of this child believed that the method would help him with his improvement in school English.

However, although the majority of children have very good or excellent grades in English at school, and six of them are even evaluated as maximally proficient in all aspects, it would be wrong to assume that this is only because they are attending the HDEE courses. To determine this, a further investigation that would include testing the children's knowledge would be necessary. At this point it cannot be concluded whether it is the HDEE method only or other factors that influence high evaluation of proficiency and high school grades in children attending the HDEE courses.

#### 4. Conclusion

The HDEE method is undoubtedly a well thought-out, successful, and unique method that provides a plausible way for the achievement of high proficiency in English. The method is recognized as excellent among many parents and children who have attended the courses worldwide for over 25 years, with more children coming back or starting the learning with the method year after year.

However, although the method seems to be offering a credible way to achieve a very high level of English proficiency through early onset of education in English and by using the mother tongue approach, many issues that are underlying the HDEE method are questionable. In addition, the method seems to be a mixture of many other methods and approaches, but it resembles the Natural Approach the most. Therefore, some amount of critique that can be applied to the Natural Approach and other approaches that the HDEE method follows can be applied to it. However, it is evident in many features of the method that there are attempts to correct the previous fallacies in the English language teaching methods and approaches.

The aim of this paper was to evaluate critically the features of the HDEE method that were divided into cognitive, linguistic, and affective features. The theoretical assumptions and research findings about these aspects of the method will now be summarized.

First, the HDEE method strongly advocates the belief that English learning should start as early as possible, because this is the only way in which a native-like proficiency can be achieved. As said, the ideas followed by Doron about superiority of the young and developing brain are encompassed by the critical period hypothesis in which it is claimed that at some point in life (around puberty or even earlier) it becomes very hard to acquire a second language successfully in all aspects, especially in pronunciation. However, many research findings about the superiority of children over adults in the second language acquisition have proven that although early start has its advantages, older learners can achieve the same results by using their cognitive capacities. The present research results confirm the fact that children who started attending the HDEE courses before the age of six, i.e. before the complete development of their mother tongue, have no significant advantage in any aspect of proficiency. It means that Doron's assumption that the early begin is crucial for the achievement of high English proficiency is false. However, it is easier to achieve success if the language learning begins at some point in the childhood (not necessarily as early as at three months of age), because a later start conveys the necessity of investment of more cognitive effort and is more affected by other factors outside the cognitive domain.

Speaking of linguistic aspects of the HDEE method, they encompass the idea of natural acquisition by paralleling and using the techniques from the process of mother tongue acquisition and applying them to the second language learning. Again, the necessity of an early start is stressed. The analysis of natural acquisition brings forward the questions about comprehensible input, the silent period, and unconscious acquisition of grammar rules in children. Overall, the HDEE method quite successfully imitates the natural process of first language acquisition, and it does not only cater for the needs of very young children, but also takes into consideration the cognitive development of older children and adjusts to it. This way, the natural and successful acquisition is ensured for all children who attend the HDEE courses, no matter when they begin. This is confirmed by the research results on the perception of English as natural in both early and late learners. Also, there is a conclusion that the exposure to English from outside or at home is not necessarily followed by high grades at school, but that the high proficiency is more likely to be explained by children being exposed to comprehensible input, involved into interaction, and being corrected, as they are in the HDEE lessons.

The affective features of the HDEE method could be considered its strongest points. This study has shown that children and parents really like the method, and that the method definitely contributes to children's affect for English and learning in general. Also, by addressing the child

as the whole person, it positively influences the child's development. Although the affective-holistic side can be separated from the proficiency, these factors definitely contribute to the process of successful acquisition.

Overall, the HDEE method provides an excellent way for learning English in a fun, child-centred way. In addition, its methodological features provide all the components that are necessary for successful acquisition. However, the achievement of the native-like proficiency or bilingualism in children only by attending the HDEE method from the three months of age still sounds as a promise that is not likely to be fulfilled. On the other hand, the method still offers a plausible way for the achievement of very high English proficiency by taking all the necessary factors into consideration. Nevertheless, the same result can be achieved if the learning begins after the complete process of the development of the mother tongue.

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**UPITNIK**  
**za roditelje djece polaznika centra Helen Doron**

Cijenjeni roditelji!

Studentica sam Anglistike nastavničkog usmjerenja na Filozofskom fakultetu u Osijeku te u sklopu izrade diplomskog rada provodim istraživanje koje se tiče učenja engleskog jezika prema metodi Helen Doron. Molila bih Vas da odvojite nekoliko minuta svoga vremena i riješite ovaj upitnik. Upitnik je u potpunosti anoniman, a rezultati će se objaviti i interpretirati samo u diplomskom radu. Jedan se upitnik odnosi na jedno dijete i sastoji se od dva dijela u kojima u prvi dio upisujete tražene podatke, a u drugome dijelu izražavate svoje slaganje s tvrdnjom. Drugi dio rješava se na sljedeći način:

1. pročitajte tvrdnju

2. označite na ljestvici od 1 do 5 uolikoj mjeri se slažete s navedenom tvrdnjom pri čemu brojevi imaju značenje:

1 – uopće se ne slažem

2 – djelomično se slažem

3 – niti se slažem niti se ne slažem

4 – slažem se

5 – u potpunosti se slažem

Hvala na Vašem vremenu i pomoći.

Dora Rolj Kovačević

Napomena: U upitniku će se naziv „Helen Doron“ pisati u skraćenom obliku kao „HD“.

**1. Molim Vas da sljedeće podatke upišete na crte:**

-dob djeteta (u godinama): \_\_\_\_\_

-dob djeteta kada je ono prvi puta počelo biti izloženo (putem televizije i sl.) engleskom jeziku (u godinama, a za dob mlađu od 2 godine u mjesecima): \_\_\_\_\_

-dob djeteta kada je ono počelo pohađati nastavu engleskog prema metodi HD (u godinama, a za dob mlađu od 2 godine u mjesecima): \_\_\_\_\_

-prosječna ocjena iz engleskog jezika koju dijete ima u školskoj nastavi (ako dijete ne uči engleski kao strani jezik u redovnoj školi, ostavite prazno): \_\_\_\_\_

Govorite li Vi engleski jezik? Zaokružite DA ili NE.

DA      NE

Koju biste ocjenu od 1 do 5 (1-loše, 5-izvrsno) dali svome znanju engleskog jezika? Upišite na crtu.

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. Zaokružite broj koji najbolje opisuje Vaše slaganje s tvrdnjom:**

1. Dijete rado pohađa sate engleskog jezika u HD centru.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Učenje engleskog jezika prema metodi HD odražava se pozitivno na samopouzdanje djeteta.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Učenje engleskog jezika prema HD metodi odražava se pozitivno na uspjeh djeteta u školskoj nastavi engleskog (ili drugog) jezika.	1 2 3 4 5



4. Pohađanje sati engleskog jezika prema HD metodi pozitivno utječe na cjelokupni razvoj i uspjeh djeteta.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Učenje engleskog prema metodi HD djetetu daje značajnu prednost u znanju engleskog jezika u usporedbi s vršnjacima.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Pohađanje sati engleskog jezika u HD centru povećava samopouzdanje djeteta.	1 2 3 4 5
7. Dijete se na engleskom jeziku izražava lako i spontano.	1 2 3 4 5
8. Dijete govori engleski jezik bez straha.	1 2 3 4 5
9. Dijete vrlo lako i brzo usvaja novi vokabular engleskog jezika te ga bez razmišljanja primjenjuje u govoru.	1 2 3 4 5
10. Dijete vrlo lako i brzo usvaja gramatičke strukture engleskog jezika te ih bez razmišljanja primjenjuje u govoru.	1 2 3 4 5
11. Engleski jezik dijete smatra prirodnim.	1 2 3 4 5
12. Djetetov izgovor engleskih riječi i rečenica vrlo je sličan onome izvornih govornika.	1 2 3 4 5
13. Dijete zna pisati i čitati na engleskom jeziku primjereno dobi.	1 2 3 4 5
14. Engleski jezik se ponekad sponatno pojavljuje u govoru djeteta.	1 2 3 4 5
15. Dijete je i izvan školske nastave i nastave u HD centru u velikoj mjeri izloženo engleskom jeziku (putem televizije, i sl.).	1 2 3 4 5
16. Nastava prema HD metodi koja je isključivo na engleskom jeziku djetetu ne stvara poteškoće u praćenju i razumijevanju.	1 2 3 4 5
17. Roditelji s djetetom rade engleski kod kuće.	1 2 3 4 5
18. Materijali iz kojih dijete uči engleski jezik u HD centru su djetetu zanimljivi.	1 2 3 4 5
19. Materijali iz kojih dijete uči engleski jezik u HD centru djetetu predstavljaju izazov i potiču na učenje.	1 2 3 4 5