Pre-Service Teachers' Beliefs about Teaching English to Primary School Children

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Mišljenja budućih nastavnika engleskog jezika o poučavanju engleskog jezika na osnovnoškolskoj razini

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Abstract

One of the most important factors that influence the teachers' work in the classroom is the understanding of their own beliefs and emotions about teaching. This paper focuses on the research that was carried out at the University of Osijek. The aim was to identify pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English to primary school children. The instruments employed were a questionnaire and a structured interview. The pre-service teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire related to some aspects of teaching English as a foreign language in primary schools, in particular the nature of early foreign language acquisition, teaching methods and techniques. Additionally, a structured interview was conducted with some of the respondents who took part in the elective course *Teaching English to Young Learners*. The results show that the pre-service teachers have already had a formed and consistent set of beliefs about teaching and learning, probably influenced by their previous experiences. Finally, some questions for future research are raised and some constructive guidelines for teaching practice are suggested.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, teaching beliefs, teaching English in primary schools, young learners

Sažetak

Jedan od najvažnijih čimbenika koji utječu na rad nastavnika u učionici je razumijevanje njihovih vlastitih mišljenja i osjećaja o poučavanju. Ovaj diplomski rad opisuje istraživanje koje je provedeno na Sveučilištu u Osijeku. Cilj je bio istražiti mišljenja budućih nastavnika o poučavanju engleskog jezika na osnovnoškolskoj razini. Instrumenti koji su korišteni bili su upitnik i strukturirani intervju. Budući nastavnici ispunili su upitnik koji se odnosi na neke aspekte poučavanja engleskoj kao stranog jezika, točnije na razvoj engleskog jezika u djece osnovnoškolske dobi te na metode i tehnike poučavanja. Dodatno su intervjuirani i neki od polaznika izbornog kolegija Nastava engleskog jezika u ranoj školskoj dobi. Rezultati pokazuju da budući nastavnici već imaju oblikovan i postojan skup mišljenja o poučavanju i učenju, na koji su vjerojatno utjecala njihova prijašnja iskustva. Na kraju, predložena su neka pitanja za daljnje istraživanje te ponuđene konstruktivne smjernice za praktičnu primjenu u nastavi.

Ključne riječi: budući nastavnici, mišljenja o poučavanju, poučavanje engleskog jezika u osnovnim školama, učenici rane školske dobi

1. Introduction

Teaching is one of the most demanding professions. It is not a craft that can be learnt through on-the-job training but rather an ongoing commitment and a life-long process of personal and professional development. It begins with the desire to become a teacher and continues with the demanding teacher training process towards a suitable teaching qualification. Prospective teachers are thus faced with the potential clash of their own preconceived, often idealized, beliefs about teaching and the sudden revelation of the reality and demands of the teaching profession. Studies on the demands that prospective teachers are about to face are not sufficient. Especially neglected is the articulation of demands in terms of pre-service teachers' beliefs about English language teaching and experience based school practice. The following questions often pose a dilemma among pre-service English language teachers: Which factors influence pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English in primary schools? Is the pre-service teachers' belief system deeply-rooted or susceptible to change? What effect would it have on their future profession – encouraging or restricting? Bearing all that in mind, pre-service teachers sometimes do not feel completely prepared for the real-life classroom that is awaiting them. Adequately equipped with theoretical knowledge and language skills, they often have problems with applying the same in the classroom, which eventually results in personal discouragement and frustration.

Pre-service teacher training, as well as pre-service teachers' beliefs and perceptions about teaching, will definitely influence their future work, i.e. the prospective teachers will probably teach the way they were taught. However, teachers' beliefs are not only a valuable construct in their personal and professional development but also in their influence on young learners. This is the reason why this thesis aims to address the potential gender or academic year preferences among the pre-service English language teachers' beliefs about teaching English in primary schools or the influence of the study course/s on their perceptions on teaching methods and techniques. It is to be expected that there is no difference in beliefs between female and male pre-service teachers. However, we hypothesize that the academic year and the choice of the elective study courses do have the influence on their perceptions.

The thesis consists of a theoretical and a research part. The first part provides a theoretical backdrop for the practical part of the paper. Chapter 2 brings a literature overview of the main research findings on teachers' beliefs, as well as an overview of relevant definitions of the term given by different authors. The thesis focuses on pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English in the primary school. Chapter 3 briefly tackles the issue of some misconceptions about

teaching young learners. It continues with an overview of child development and provides information about first and second language learning and the key learning principles. Teaching English to young learners is very challenging and therefore brought to the focus.

Chapter 4 discusses a variety of teaching methods and techniques and starts with the definition of the term *language teaching method*. Furthermore, elaboration is given of 10 different methods and techniques and methodological innovations that put communication and the learner in the center are presented. In addition, there is also a summary chart in which all the techniques mentioned are compared.

Chapter 5 reports on the research that was conducted among the pre-service teachers at the University of Osijek. The aim was to identify pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English to primary school children and two instruments were used for the research. The first instrument was the questionnaire and the second instrument was a structured interview that was conducted among the participants enrolled in the course *Teaching English to Young Learners*. After analyzing the data using IBM SPSS Statistics, descriptive analysis and statistical tests (Independent Samples t-test), the quantitative results of the questionnaire and qualitative results of an interview were presented and discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section will offer a framework for articulating teachers' beliefs and a selective overview of previous research studies dealing with the same topic worldwide.

2.1. A framework for articulating teachers' beliefs

Beliefs could be defined as personal constructs that can provide an understanding of a teacher's practice (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996, all cited in Shinde and Karekatti, 2010). Similarly, White (1999, as cited in Shinde and Karekatti, 2012) also claims that beliefs have an adaptive function to help the teacher to understand what he does. Furthermore, William and Burden (1997) divide their discussion of teachers' beliefs into three areas: (1) about language learning, (2) about learners and (3) about themselves as language teachers. A number of studies (Yang, 2000; Shinde and Karekatti, 2012) have attempted to investigate the beliefs of ESL teachers through questionnaires. Following the footsteps of Yang's (2000) classification, Shinde and Karekatti (2012) acknowledge four different areas of teachers' beliefs: (1) general beliefs about child development, (2) general beliefs about language learning, (3) specific beliefs about teaching English to children, and (4) self-efficacy and expectations and, on the basis of related questionnaires (Horowitz, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Yang, 2000, as cited in Shinde and Karekatti, 2012:74), they developed a questionnaire that was relevant for the research that was conducted in this master thesis. Their questionnaire was adapted for the research, i.e. some items were excluded, while some parts were added.

Furthermore, teacher cognition, i.e. what teachers know, believe and think, raises many questions: What do teachers have cognitions about? How do these cognitions develop? How do they interact with teacher learning? How do they interact with classroom practice (Borg, 2003)?

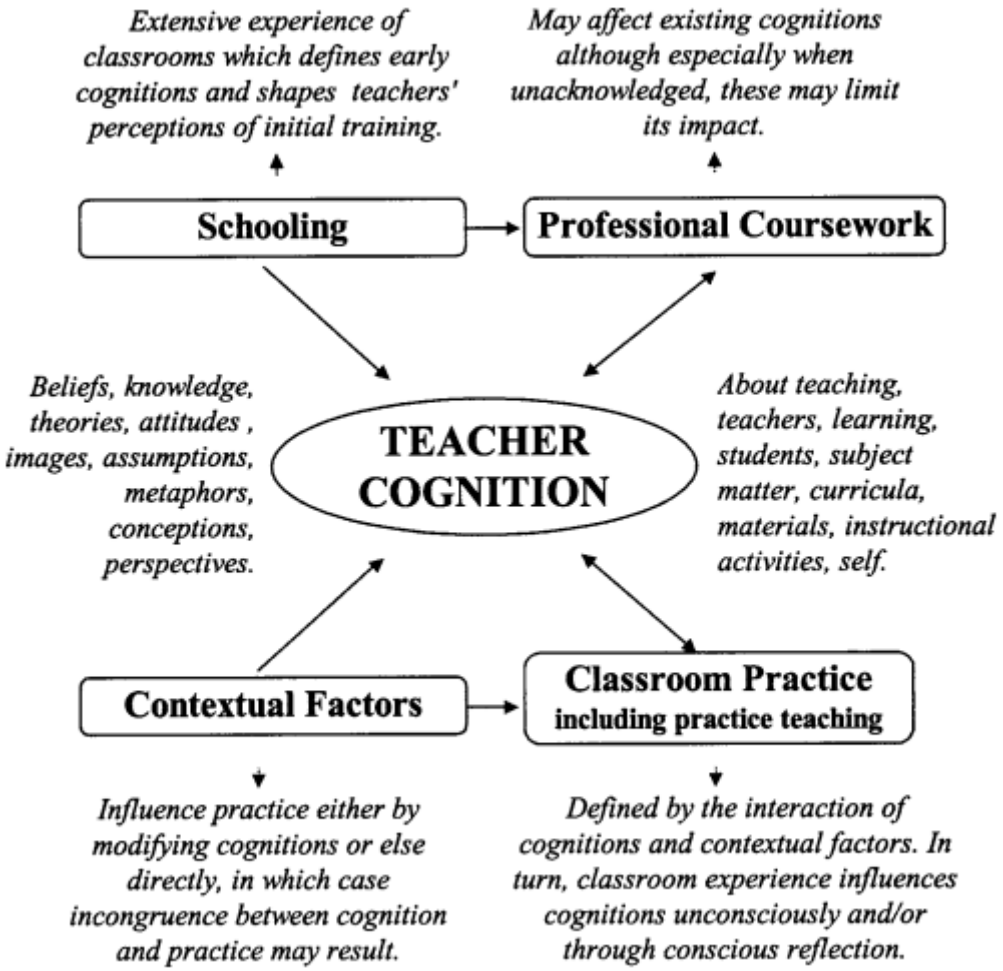


Figure 1: Teacher cognition (source Borg, 1997, as cited in Borg, 2003:82)

Figure 1 (Borg, 1997, as cited in Borg 2003:82) offers insight into Borg's definition of teacher cognition and summarizes the answers to the questions stated above. It is evident that teachers have cognitions about all the aspects of teaching, and that schooling, professional coursework, contextual factors and classroom practice, each in its own way, influence teachers' beliefs and perceptions. Similarly, Graves (2000:26) points out that the origin of teachers' beliefs may be traced in their past experiences but may also "arise from work experience and the discourses of the workplace."

Furthermore, Graves (2000) offers a framework for articulating teachers' beliefs. It consists of the following 4 categories: 1. your view of language, 2. your view of the social context of language, 3. your view of learning and learners, 4. your view of teaching. According to Graves's (2000:28) view of language in the first category, the "beliefs about which view of language should be emphasized will translate into beliefs about how the language should be learned." Thus, an

emphasis on language as rule-governed may lead to the belief that learning a language means using it with no errors. The social context of the language in the second category implies that learning a language involves understanding both one's own culture and the target culture. When it comes to the teacher's view of learning and learners, Graves (2000) sees learning as an inductive (the learner is a maker of knowledge) or a deductive process (the learner is an internalizer of knowledge). Graves (2000) also gives a positive answer to some questions concerning the nature of the teaching process and the potential dual role of a teacher (Is the teacher a learner? Is the teacher an expert?).

As we can see from the previous studies (Borg, 1997; Graves, 2000; Shinde and Karekatti, 2012), all the researchers agree that language teachers' beliefs need to be taken into consideration. The teachers have cognitions about all the aspects of teaching as well as cognitions about themselves as teachers. It could be, therefore, concluded that "what teachers do is a reflection of what they know and believe" (Richards and Lockhart 1996:29).

2.2. Recent studies

In the last thirty years, there has been a huge interest in studying teacher's beliefs (Johnson, 1994; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Li and Walsh, 2011). Although the beliefs are difficult to investigate because of their "complex nature" (Graves, 2000:25), they are one of the most valuable constructs in teacher education. For Pajares (1992, as cited in Li and Walsh, 2011), beliefs are a messy construct because it is difficult to distinguish between knowledge and beliefs. It is generally accepted that teaching is greatly affected by the belief systems of the teachers. Teachers' beliefs influence their teaching attitude, the choice of teaching methods and teaching policies, but also the learners' development. Horwitz (1987, as cited in Shinde and Karekatti, 2010) states that the formation of teachers' educational beliefs in the language teaching process will indirectly influence forming the effective teaching methods that they will use, and will bring about an improvement in the learners' language learning abilities. As it was also mentioned in Shinde and Karekatti (2012), some researchers, such as Liao and Chiang (2003) and Yang (2000), have studied teachers' beliefs, particularly beliefs about language learning, beliefs about learners, and beliefs about themselves as language teachers.

Some studies (Johnson, 1994; Numrich, 1996, as cited in Shinde and Karekatti, 2010) revealed that pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs are based on prior experience and how such experience

relates to classroom practice. Johnson (1994) found that pre-service teachers' instructional decisions during a class were based on images of teachers, materials, activities and classroom organization that they had personally experienced. She says that "pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs may be based largely on images from their formal language learning experiences, and in all likelihood, will represent their dominant model of action during the practicum teaching experience" (Johnson, 1994:450).

Similarly, Lamb (1995, as cited in Li and Walsh, 2011) concluded that the teachers' practices are heavily influenced by how they had interpreted ideas during and after the courses. In other words, it could be said that the teachers will teach the way they were taught. It is not clearly understood how belief systems are created, but teachers' own education experiences may contribute to the development of their beliefs. Therefore, if the teacher educators recognize that pre-service teachers hold beliefs about language teaching that might negatively affect their future learners' learning, it is very important that they work on these beliefs and change them.

Some studies, for example Phipps and Borg (2009), describe inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. They say that happens because of different contextual factors, such as a prescribed curriculum. Lamb (1995, as cited in Li and Walsh, 2011) described those discrepancies as an inability to apply new ideas within already existing syllabus and other practical constraints. However, Davis (2003, as cited in Li and Walsh, 2011) argued that the teachers' beliefs have a dual function, i.e. they see themselves as having a parental role in education, but on the other hand, they consider themselves to be powerful educators.

A lot can be learned about teachers' beliefs by looking at their interactions in the classroom practices. According to Li and Walsh (2011), there are several reasons for considering interaction as the influential variable in studying teachers' beliefs. First, "interaction lies at the very heart of teaching, learning and professional development" (Li and Walsh, 2011:42) and without it none of the aforementioned could be possible to achieve. Second, the teachers' decisions that influence teaching and learning are directly influenced by their beliefs. Third, a focus on interaction gives teachers insights into their own local context that is also shaped by their beliefs (Li and Walsh, 2011). Furthermore, Li and Walsh (2011) mention Yang (2000), Horowitz (1985) and Kern (1995) as researchers who, based on interaction, concluded that it is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language; that listening and repeating is important; and that practice in a language laboratory is essential. Yang (2000) also found that teaching culture is important, while in Kern's (1995) study the teachers were tolerating errors.

3. Teaching English in primary schools

3.1. Misunderstandings about teaching young learners

The differences between teaching English to children and adults are immediately obvious. The children are more enthusiastic and they want to please the teacher, but they lose interest quickly and it is very hard for them to keep themselves motivated. According to Cameron (2001), teaching English to young learners brings some misunderstandings. She points out two misunderstandings, the first of which is that teaching children is simple and straightforward. It is questionable because, even though children have a less complicated view of the world than adults, the teachers need to be highly skilled to reach into their worlds and be aware of the way the children learn. Secondly, it is also misleading to think that children cannot learn more than just a simple language, such as colors and numbers, nursery rhymes and songs. Children have a potential to learn about more difficult and complicated topics, such as dinosaurs or computers, and more than just simple language in terms of language structures. In other words, they are able to learn more than just the Simple Present and Present Continuous.

3.2. Young children and foreign language learning

Observing the children in learning situations testifies that learning is an "active process" (Pinter, 2006:5). In her book *Teaching Languages to Young* Learners, Cameron (2001) puts learning in the centre of the frame and highlights two kinds of active learning processes -a "learning-centered" perspective and "learner-centered" teaching. Learner-centered teaching places the learner at the center of both the curriculum and teacher thinking and this is a great improvement, but the learning-centered perspective prevents the risk of "losing sight of what it is we are trying to do in schools, and of the enormous potential that lies beyond the child" (Cameron, 2001:I). The past two decades have witnessed an increased interest in the area of teaching foreign languages to ever younger learners both in Croatia (Petrović, 2004; Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012; Mihaljević Djigunović, 2013) and worldwide (Brewster, Ellis and Girard, 2002; Enever, 2014). Based on the available literature resources, our conclusions are mostly drawn from the works on child development, learning theory and first language development. When we think about the child as a

language learner, developmental psychology naturally comes to mind. The theorists most widely recognized in this field are Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner.

3.2.1. Piaget

Piaget was studying how the child functions in the world that surrounds him, and how that influences his mental development. The child is in constant interaction with the world and takes actions to solve problems that occur. In the early stages of development that happens with concrete objects, but later, it continues in the mind and this is the way thinking develops.

Cameron (2001) mentions two basic components of the Piagetian theory of cognitive development -*assimilation and accommodation*. They are both two complementary processes of adaptations, but differ according to the development that can take place as a result of an activity. Assimilation is when actions take place without any change to the child, while the accommodation involves the child adjusting to the features of the environment. Even though assimilation and accommodation are adaptive processes of behavior, they become the processes of thinking and they occur together. For example, the child who has learnt to use a spoon is presented with a fork. The child may first use the fork in the way the spoon was used; this is the assimilation. But when the child realizes that the fork is used in another way, accommodation occurs (Cameron, 2001). Accommodation has been taken into second language learning under the term "restructuring", used to refer to the re-organization of mental representations of a language (McLaughlin, 1992, as cited in Cameron, 2001:3).

The child passes through a series of stages until he/she reaches a final stage of logical thinking. Cameron (2001) mentions Margaret Donaldson's (1978) study which showed that when appropriate language, tasks and objects are used, the children are capable of more. Piaget thus underestimated the children's fullest potential. Unlike Vygotsky, Piaget also does not mention the social component of a child development. The child is looking for a purpose in what he/she sees and "actively tries to make sense of the world…asks questions…wants to know…Also from a very early stage, the child has intentions; he wants to do." (Donaldson 1978:86, as cited in Cameron, 2001:4)

It could be said that the classroom creates and offers opportunities for children to learn almost in the same way as the world offers them the chance for development.

3.2.2. Vygotsky

Vygotsky's theory is focused on the social component of child development and that is the major difference between Piaget's and Vygotsky's view. However, he does not neglect the child's individuality. The most important shift in child development happens in his second year of life when the development of the first language starts. The language provides new opportunities for discovering the world. The children can often be heard talking to themselves, which is called "private speech", but as they get older, they can make difference between "private" and "speech for others." (Wertsch, 1985, as cited in Cameron, 2001:5)

Vygotsky sees the child as an active learner surrounded by other people who help him learn. Adults help the children to learn more than they can on their own and serve as a kind of mediators between the world and the children (Cameron, 2001). Vygotsky suggested that intelligence was better measured by what a child can do with a skilled help, rather than by what a child can do alone and he called it the zone of proximal development (further in the text ZPD). Cameron (2001) gives an example how, in foreign language learning, some children listening to the teacher modeling a new question would be able to repeat it, or even use other phrases, and yet another would have difficulties repeating it accurately. It means that the children at the same point in development make different use of the help from the adults.

Vygotsky sees the child first doing things with the help of others and later making independent actions and thinking. The shift between these two ways of behaving is called internalization. For Vygotsky it was a transformation; thinking about something is different from doing it (Wertsch, 1985, as cited in Cameron, 2001). This concept can help us understand learning processes in the foreign language. First, the teacher is using the language meaningfully and later it is internalized and becomes a part of every child's knowledge.

3.2.3. Bruner

Bruner thought that the language is the most important tool for cognitive growth and the most significant terms connected to it are s*caffolding* and *routines*. He believed that there has to be a framework provided for learning to take place. When the young child is learning a new language, usually the mother is the one who is providing a framework for the child to learn and is always one step ahead of the child. Cameron (2001) mentions the experiment with American mothers and

children. The parents who scaffolded tasks effectively got the children interested in the task, made the task simple, pointed out the important things, controlled the child's frustrations, etc. Wood (1998, as cited in Cameron 2001:9) also suggests how the teachers can scaffold the children's learning, which is shown in Figure 2.

Teachers can help children to	*By*
attend to what is relevant	suggesting praising the significant providing focusing activities
adopt useful strategies	encouraging rehearsal being explicit about organisation
remember the whole task and goals	reminding modelling providing part–whole activities

Figure 2: Teacher's scaffolding (source Wood, 1998, as cited in Cameron, 2001:9)

In this case, the teacher does the majority of the work for the children because they are not yet able to do these things on their own.

Moreover, Bruner suggests *routines* as a useful idea for language teaching. A good example for the routine is parents reading stories to their children where the language is predictable, but there is also a "space for growth" that "ideally matches the child's zone of proximal development" (Cameron, 2001:10). It could be concluded that routines help in a child's language and cognitive development. Children love routines and this can be transferred to the classroom. Routines help children to develop their language meaningfully because children use their previous experience to make sense of the new language and make progress.

3.3. Learning a language

3.3.1. Learning the first and the second language

When it comes to first language learning, it was thought that the acquisition was complete by the age of five. However, the statement is not true. Formal literacy skills are still developing at the age of five or six, as well as some structures in spoken language which cannot be acquired until the written language is developed. Perera (1984, as cited in Cameron, 2001) suggests relative clauses as an example, and says that an eleven year old tends not to use relative clauses and pronouns because they mainly occur in a written language. Furthermore, there is a connection between the child's language development in various domains and the language use in their families. Children who are exposed to narratives that are told between the family members on everyday topics are likely to develop their narrative and discourse skills faster and tend to have a wide vocabulary. Therefore, it is important for the foreign language teachers to keep in mind, that children will start learning a language by bringing together differently developed skills and abilities (Cameron, 2001). In addition to this, Cameron (2001:13) says that "in Vygotskyan terms, it seems likely that the second or foreign language ZDP may not be global, but that different aspects of language will have different ZPDs." It can be concluded that different children will learn different things from the same lesson, depending on their abilities and what they find easy to learn.

The Critical Period Hypothesis supports the idea that children learn a second language better and faster than adults. It holds the idea that older learners cannot reach the level of proficiency that a young child before puberty can. It is so because the child's brain can still use mechanisms that it used for first language acquisition. A study into brain activity (Kim, 1997, as cited in Cameron, 2001) discovered that the brain activity of the early bilinguals differs from those who start learning a language at the age of 7, i.e. they use a different part of the brain for language activation. However, some studies provide suggestions against this assertion. For example, Lighbrown and Spada (1999, as cited in Cameron, 2001) suggest that, if proficiency is the goal, then early learning is useful, but if the communicative ability is the goal, then the benefits of early learning are less clear.

Furthermore, it is usual for the first language to affect second or foreign language learning and this is called the "Competition Model" (Bates and MacWhinney, 1989, as cited in Cameron 2001:14). This happens because different languages carry the meaning in a different way, for example, the

word order may cause difficulties in interpretation of the language. In addition to the fact that languages affect each other, when thinking about language acquisition, there is also age to be considered. Younger children tend to pay more attention to sound and prosody, while older children pay attention to word order (Harley, 1995, as cited in Cameron, 2001).

Moreover, Cameron (2001) suggests that the language experiences that the children get in a foreign language classroom will influence how their language develops. It could be potentially true. For example, if children are exposed to a question and answer lesson, they will become good at this type of lesson, but not necessarily at other types requiring talking. Martin and Mitchell (1997, as cited in Cameron 2001:16) and Weinert (1994, as cited in Cameron, 2001) support the idea that different teaching styles and beliefs of teachers result in learners producing certain language structures, rather than others and reduce the language used by their teachers.

3.3.2. Age and language learning

There are many advantages to start learning a language at an early age. Children who start early develop advantages in some aspects of the language, but not in all of them. When starting early, listening and pronunciation develop very fast, but only when the learning happens in a naturalistic context. When it comes to grammar, young children acquire it implicitly and much slower than older learners, so they make a slow progress, even though they started early. Cameron (2001) also mentions immersion learning. She further explains that immersion learners study school subjects in a foreign language and, because they are more exposed to it, have more experience with the language. However, it is doubtful that the quantity of the exposure to the language in younger children will make a difference when it comes to benefits. This is so because some aspects of the language, such as grammar, develop together with the cognitive skills, and no matter how much young children are exposed to the language, some aspects of it will develop slower.

When language is considered in terms of skills, it is divided into four areas: listening, speaking, writing and reading. However, young children who start early are exposed to nothing but the spoken language for the first several years of learning, so this division does not make much sense. Cameron (2001) suggests the organizational scheme for language, summarized in Figure 3.

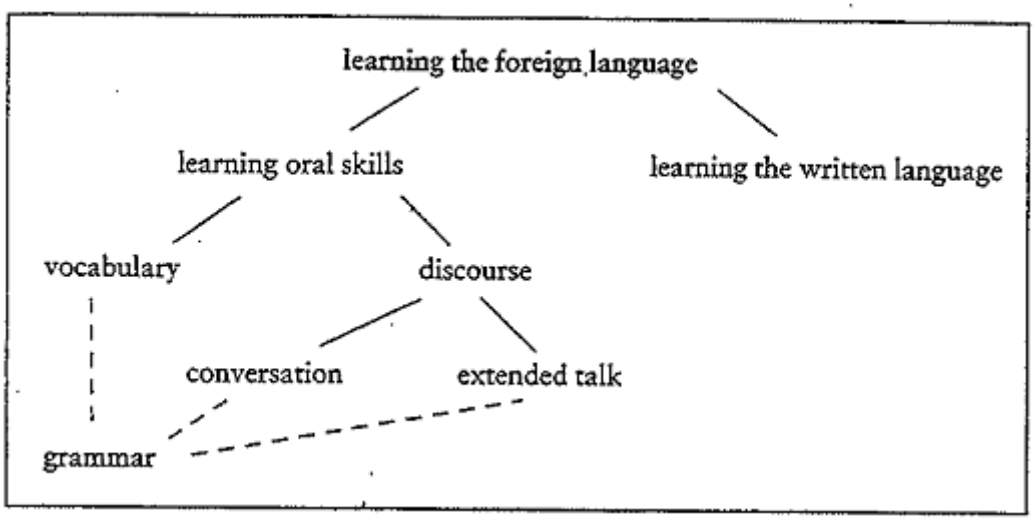


Figure3: Young children learning a language (source Cameron, 2001:19)

She suggests focusing on oral skills, i.e. vocabulary and interaction (labeled as discourse skills), while grammar emerges from the vocabulary and discourse in their language learning.

3.3.3. Key learning principles

Some important principles about young children learning a foreign language have emerged. Cameron (2001) suggests the following key learning principles:

1. *Children try to construct meaning*: children's world knowledge is partial and the teacher must construct activities that will allow them to make sense of the knowledge and find its meaning and purpose.

2. *Children need space for language growth*: routines and scaffolding are the strategies that seem helpful for language growth.

3. *Language in use carries cues to meaning that may not be noticed*: children need help to notice aspects of language that carry meaning, such as grammar.

4. *Development can be seen as internalizing from social interaction*: language can grow as the child uses it with others.

5. *Children's foreign language learning depends on what they experience*: there is a link between how children are taught and what they learn, so the greater the language experience, the more they are likely to learn.

4. Teaching methods and techniques

4.1. The definition of the term *language teaching method*

Language teaching methods are invaluable in teacher training in many ways. First, if the prosperous teachers are aware of the way they teach, they can better grasp why they do what they do. Furthermore, they can choose to teach differently. The knowledge of methods also leads to knowledge of professional discourse that can be used among the members of the teaching community, so that the teachers can help each other in their professional growth (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Larsen-Freeman (2000:1) uses the term *language teaching method* for "a coherent set of links between actions and thoughts in language teaching." What follows is that it is important for the teachers to become aware of the thoughts that guide them through their actions in the classroom. Coherent set, however, means that there should be a theoretical connection between those links. Griffiths (2008:257) points out that "teachers should be concerned not only with finding the best method or with getting the correct answer but also with assisting a student in order to enable him to learn on his own." In the following subsections, all the methods are listed and discussed.

4.2. The grammar-translation method

Many students learn a language in this way. According to the method, the main purpose of learning a language is being able to read in the target language. It is therefore common for the teachers who use this method to give their students excerpts from books that they would translate from English to Croatian or any other language. The students' success in language is thus measured by their translation skills. In order to become fully proficient, the students need to acquire grammar rules and vocabulary explicitly and through translation. In addition, the use of the mother tongue is common because the use of the target language is not the goal for the users of this method. The teacher is the authority figure and there is little interaction in the classroom. In this method, reading and writing are emphasized and there is much less attention given to speaking, listening and pronunciation. Also, memorization as a technique is used frequently; the students have to memorize a list of words both in their native and the target language.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) gives an example of a class that is being thought along the same principles. They are reading an excerpt from Mark Twain's book and every student reads and translates a few lines into Spanish. The teacher uses Spanish to explain the unknown words and grammar rules, instead of presenting them inductively. It could be concluded that this method has some disadvantages because reading and translating certainly is not the only aspect of the target language that should be acquired. Similarly, the students should learn something *about* the target language and its culture.

4.3. The direct method

As opposed to the grammar-translation method that was not very effective in preparing students to communicate effectively, the direct method became popular because it was successful. . This method has one rule: no translation is allowed (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To exemplify this method of teaching, the classroom situation that Larsen-Freeman (2000) mentions will be used. The students in lower secondary school in Italy are having a lesson that is entitled "Looking at a Map". They are reading a passage from a textbook and exchanging questions and information with the teacher. All of them are speaking and explaining everything in English. After that, they fill in the blanks in an exercise in the textbook as they read it aloud. Finally, through the dictation about the history of the United States, the students practice the fact about the history and geography, as well as vocabulary and pronunciation.

Through this example, it is visible how the students learn how to communicate and think in English. The students are more active than in the grammar-translation method because they are encouraged by the teacher to talk and ask questions. It is important to mention that the teacher is aware of the students' need to associate the meaning and the target language, so in order to achieve that, the teacher uses realia, pictures or gestures, but never translates. Similarly, grammar is not taught deductively, but the students figure out the rules from the examples they are given. It could be concluded that vocabulary is more important than grammar in this method. A lot of attention is given to pronunciation, which is definitely appropriate for young learners and equally useful to older students. Of course, the constant use of the target language instead of the mother tongue could be stressful for the students. In order to avoid misunderstandings, in some situations, such as elaborating on the rules, teachers should rely on the use of their mother tongue.

4.4. Communicative language teaching

The name of the following method implies that the main goal is to learn to communicate in the target language. However, it is possible that the students know the linguistic rule, but do not know how to use the language (Widdowson, 1978, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In other words, as Hymes (1971, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000) suggests, communication requires both linguistic and communicative competence. The students need to know many linguistic forms, meanings and functions to be able to choose the right form for a given social context. In a classroom where communicative language teaching (further in the text CLT) is being practiced, the role of the teacher is to create situations that require communication and to guide and advise their performance. In CLT, "students *use* the language a great deal through communicative activities, such as games, role-plays and problem-solving tasks" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:129). It is widely known that the students, especially young ones, highly benefit from games and game-like activities. Another characteristic of CLT is the use of authentic materials, as well as working in small groups of students. In this way, they are given the opportunity to use the language the way that it is really used.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) gives the example that shows a classroom in Canada. CLT is being practiced and the students are given a newspaper article to read, make predictions about it and do a role-play. When someone makes an error, the teacher and the rest of the class ignore it because it is considered to be a part of the development of communication skills. When it comes to the use of the mother tongue, "judicious use of the students' native language is permitted in CLT" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:132), but the target language should be used whenever possible.

It is important to mention role-plays that are used frequently in CLT. This technique gives the students the opportunity to communicate in the target language and to practice using the language in various social contexts and roles. Role plays can be very structured –restricting in what the students have to say or less structured - letting the students decide what to say on their own (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

4.5. The audio-lingual method

The audio-lingual method is very similar to the direct method because it also emphasizes oral skills. However, this method, unlike the direct method, drills students in the use of grammatical

sentence patterns (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It also incorporates principles from linguistics and behavioral psychology (Fries, 1945 and Skinner, 1957, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It is thought that acquiring sentence patterns happens through conditioning, i.e. "helping learners to respond correctly to stimuli through shaping and reinforcement" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:35). The origin of these principles are to be found among behaviorists, for whom the human being is an organism capable of different behaviors that are dependent upon crucial elements in learning and that could be seen in Figure 4: a stimulus that elicits behavior, a response to a stimulus and reinforcement that encourages the repetition or suppression of the response in the future (Richards and Rogers, 1986).

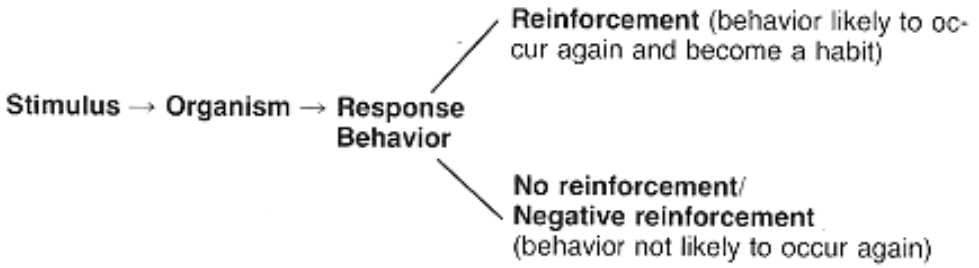


Figure 4: Behavioral learning (source Richards and Rogers, 1986:50)

The principles of the audio-lingual method can be seen in Larsen-Freeman's (2000) example of a classroom in which this method is being practiced. With a beginner's class in Mali, the teacher uses only the target language and pictures, actions and realia to illustrate the meaning. The teacher is both a model and a leader whom the students follow and imitate. The primary goal is to achieve automatic use of the language without thinking about it. That is why the teacher uses dialogues to present new vocabulary and structural patterns. Furthermore, "drills (such as repetition, backward build-up, chain, substitution, transformation, and question-and-answer) are conducted based upon the patterns present in the dialog" (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:45). When it comes to the areas of language, the sound system and grammatical patterns are more emphasized than vocabulary, although explicit grammar rules are not provided. However, the lesson should not consist only of drills.

In addition, Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983, as cited in Richards and Rogers, 1986:67) summarize and list the major differences of the audio-lingual method and CLT, as shown in Figure 5.

Audio-lingual	*Communicative Language Teaching*
1. Attends to structure and form more than meaning.	Meaning is paramount.
2. Demands memorization of structure-based dialogs.	Dialogs, if used, center around communicative functions and are not normally memorized.
3. Language items are not necessarily contextualized.	Contextualization is a basic premise.
4. Language learning is learning structures, sounds, or words.	Language learning is learning to communicate.
5. Mastery, or "over-learning" is sought.	Effective communication is sought.
6. Drilling is a central technique.	Drilling may occur, but peripherally.
7. Native-speaker-like pronunciation is sought.	Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.
8. Grammatical explanation is avoided.	Any device which helps the learners is accepted – varying according to their age, interest, etc.
9. Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises.	Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
10. The use of the student's native language is forbidden.	Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible.
11. Translation is forbidden at early levels.	Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
12. Reading and writing are deferred till speech is mastered.	Reading and writing can start from the first day, if desired.
13. The target linguistic system will be learned through the overt teaching of the patterns of the system.	The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.
14. Linguistic competence is the desired goal.	Communicative competence is the desired goal (i.e. the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately).
15. Varieties of language are recognized but not emphasized.	Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology.
16. The sequence of units is determined solely by principles of linguistic complexity.	Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning which maintains interest.

Figure 5: Audio-lingual method and CLT (source Richards and Rogers, 1986:67)

4.6. The silent way

The silent way method was devised by Caleb Gattegno. He is well known for his approach for teaching of initial reading in which sounds are coded with different colors. This method is based on the belief that the teacher should be silent as much as possible in the classroom and the learner should produce as much language as possible. Richards and Rogers (1986:99) state the following learning hypotheses that underlie Gattegno's work:

1. Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned.

2. Learning is facilitated by accompanying physical objects.

3. Learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned.

Gattegno believed that teaching means serving the learning process and not dominating it and concluded that we initiate the learning process by mobilizing our inner resources, such as imagination, cognition etc. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In Larsen-Freeman's (2000) example of a secondary school in Brazil the students begin their language study through the sounds. They associate the sounds with the colors and later the colors are used to learn the spelling and to read and pronounce the words. Furthermore, the students need to be able to express their thoughts, perceptions and feelings, as well as to be independent from the teacher. For this to be achieved, the teacher remains silent and offers help only when necessary, keeping an emphasis on the students' awareness. However, when the teacher does speak, it is in order to give clues, but not to model the language. With the silent way method, pronunciation is emphasized and worked on from the beginning and more importance in placed on the acquisition of the melody of the language. Consequently, translation is rarely used (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Since the materials used in the silent way method are not widely known, they are discussed hereinafter. Firstly, the sound-color chart contains colored blocks, each representing one sound. The teacher and the students point to blocks of color on the chart to form syllables and words. With the chart, the students can produce sound combinations without doing so through repetition. Secondly, rods can be used to teach colors and numbers, but also prepositions (The red rod is between the blue one and the orange one). There are also word charts that help learners to read sentences and Fidel charts to help with pronunciation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

4.7. Desuggestopedia

Desuggestopedia is a method that used to be called suggestopedia, but in order to "reflect the importance placed on desuggesting limitations on learning, the name was changed" (Lozanov and Miller, personal communication as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000:73). It is a method developed by the Bulgarian educator Georgi Lozanov who describes it as a science that is concerned with the study of the nonrational and nonconscious influences that people are responding to (Richards and Rogers, 1986). The most striking characteristics of this method are the furniture and the decoration of the classroom, the role of music and the authoritative teacher. Furthermore, Lozanov emphasizes memorization of vocabulary pairs, i.e. a target language item and its translation, rather than contextualization (Richards and Rogers, 1986).

Following Bankroft (1972), Richards and Rogers (1986:145) list six principal theoretical components through which this method operates and they are to be described hereafter:

Authority: Lozanov believed that people remember best when the information is coming from an authoritative source and talks about the *ritual placebo system* which is appealing to most learners. It consists of positive experimental data, scientific-sounding language and the true-believer teacher and.

Infantilization: a teacher-learner interaction is similar to the parent-child interaction. The learner's role is taking part in role playing, games, songs and exercises.

Double-planedness: this means that the bright and colorful classroom, the shape of the furniture and the teacher's personality influence the teaching-learning process as well as the direct instruction.

Intonation, rhythm, concert pseudo-passiveness: varying the tone and rhythm prevents boredom in the class they and are coordinated with the musical background that helps to induce a relaxed attitude which Lozanov refers to as concert pseudo-passiveness.

Desuggestopedia emphasizes vocabulary and speaking communicatively and deals with grammar explicitly, but minimally (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Actually, it is said that the learners will absorb the rules if they focus on the language use.

4.8. Total physical response

Total physical response (further in the text TPR) method emphasizes the coordination of speech and action and "attempts to teach language through physical activity." (Richards and Rogers, 1986:87) It was developed by James Asher who sees the second language learning as a parallel process to the first language acquisition. He also emphasizes that comprehension skills should be developed before the learner is taught to speak. It is connected to the Comprehension Approach that refers to different comprehension-based language teaching proposals, which state that "(a) comprehension abilities precede productive skills in learning a language; (b) the teaching of speaking should be delayed until comprehension skills are established; (c) skills acquired through listening transfer to other skills; (d) teaching should emphasize meaning rather than form; and (e) teaching should minimize learner stress." (Richards and Rogers, 1896:87)

Furthermore, Asher (as cited in Richards and Rogers, 1986) lists three learning hypothesis that he thinks facilitate foreign language learning. Firstly, he says that there is an innate bio-program for language learning, which is an optimal path for the first and second language learning. The learners should develop a cognitive map for both the first and second language. Secondly, there is a brain lateralization that defines different learning functions in the left and right brain hemispheres. Also, TPR is directed to the right brain hemisphere, while the other language teaching methods are directed to left brain learning. The third hypothesis to mention is stress. Simply put, "the lower the stress, the greater the learning." (Richards and Rogers, 1986:91)

When it comes to the teaching/learning process in a real classroom, the first phase is modeling in which the learners imitate the teacher as a model who performs actions. Later, the learners perform the actions alone to show their understanding and, after they learn to respond to oral commands, the learners learn how to read and write them. It is obvious that vocabulary and grammar structures are emphasized as well as the imperatives, which are frequently used when the children are learning the first language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

For some, the postponement of the teaching speaking in the target language does not make any sense, but on the other hand, the learners should not be forced to speak until they are ready to.

4.9. Community language learning

Teachers who use this method want their learners to learn how to use the target language communicatively (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Community language learning (further in the text CLL) was developed by Charles Curran. CLL redefines the roles of the teacher (*the counselor*) and the learner (*the clients*). Richards and Rogers (1986) compare the following situation in CLL to the client-counselor relationship in psychological counseling, which is shown in Figure 6. For example, the learners sit in a circle and the teacher is standing outside of it. A learner whispers a word in L1; the teacher translates it into L2; the learner repeats the word in L2 into a cassette; the learners reflect on their feelings.

Psychological counseling (client–counselor)	*Community Language Learning (learner–knower)*
1. Client and counselor agree [contract] to counseling.	1. Learner and knower agree to language learning.
2. Client articulates his or her problem in language of affect.	2. Learner presents to the knower (in L1) a message he or she wishes to deliver to another.
3. Counselor listens carefully.	3. Knower listens and other learners overhear.
4. Counselor restates client message in language of cognition.	4. Knower restates learner's message in L2.
5. Client evaluates the accuracy of counselor's message restatement.	5. Learner repeats the L2 message form to its addressee.
6. Client reflects on the interaction of the counseling session.	6. Learner replays (from tape or memory) and reflects upon the messages exchanged during the language class.

Figure 6: Client-counselor counseling in psychological counseling and CLL (source Richards and Rogers, 1986:114)

The teacher encourages the learners to interact with each other and to form a group identity through understanding and speaking the language, which are the most emphasized skills (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). CLL combines many of the conventional, but also innovative tasks and activities, which include translation, group work, recording, transcription, analysis, listening, free conversation, reflection and observation (Richards and Rogers, 1896). To conclude, Larsen-Freeman (2000:105)

sums up the basic principles of CLL by saying that "whole-person learning of another language takes place best in a relationship of trust, support, and cooperation between the teacher and students and among students."

4.10. Methodological innovations

4.10.1. Communication-centered approaches

The following approaches make communication central: content-based instruction, task-based instruction and the participatory approach. The only difference between them is a matter of their focus.

Larsen-Freeman (2000) explains that content-based instruction combines the learning of language with learning of some other content, often academic subject. Of course, there must be clear language and content learning objectives because the learners studying a subject in a non-native language need a great deal of assistance.

Furthermore, a task-based approach provides a natural context for language learning and the learners have the opportunity to interact all the time. Through that interaction they acquire the language easily because they have to work hard to understand others and to express themselves. Prabhu (as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000) identified three types of tasks: an information-gap activity that involves the exchange of information; an opinion-gap activity that requires giving opinions and preferences and a reasoning-gap activity that requires deriving new information from the information the learners were given.

The participatory approach is similar to the content-based instruction in a way that it begins with content that is meaningful to the learners, but what is different is the nature of that content and "it is not the content of subject matter text, but rather content that is based on issues of concern to students." (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:150) This means that there is a content, like music or sports that the learners are interested in and that can represent a useful tool for their language acquisition.

4.10.2. Learner-centered approaches

The central focus of the following methodological innovations is the language learner and these include learning strategy training, cooperative learning and multiple intelligences.

The learners are thought to be responsible for their own learning, so Rubin (1975, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000) investigated and identified the strategies that the good learners use to learn a language. For Rubin, good language learners are accurate guessers with a strong desire to communicate. However, simply recognizing the learners' behavior was not enough and it was concluded that the learners needed training in learning strategies. Chamot and O'Malley (1994, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000) distinguish between metacognitive strategies, i.e. strategies that are used to plan, monitor and evaluate the task, cognitive strategies (interacting and manipulating what is to be learned) and social/effective strategies where learners interact with others. Based on what has been previously said, it can be concluded that learning-strategy training could complement content-based instruction. Furthermore, cooperative learning involves learning from each other in a group and it can be easily applied in a task-based approach.

Every learner is different and the teachers have to take that into consideration. Additionally, they should be aware of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences which can be classified into seven distinct categories: logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, body/kinestetic, musical/rythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and verbal/linguistic (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The easiest way to teach from a multiple perspective intelligence perspective is to follow Christison's (1996) and Armstrong's (1994, as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000) suggestion for the use of the activities that fit each type of intelligence. Puzzles and games, classifications and categorizations are suitable for logical/mathematical intelligence, while charts, grids and videos suit best visual/spatial intelligence. Pantomime and hands on activities are convinient for body/kinesthetic and singing and playing music for musical/rhytmic. Similary, people who have verbal/linguistic intelligence emphasized their preference for story telling and debates. Interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences are opposites; pairwork is suitable for the first and self-evaluation for the second.

To sum up, the following Figure 7 shows all the methods that have been previously discussed in this chapter. It summarizes each method with regard to language/culture, learning and teaching.

Method/Approach	Language/Culture	Language Learning	Language Teaching
Grammar-Translation	Literary language Culture: literature and the fine arts	Exercise mental muscle	Have students translate from target language (TL) texts to native language
Direct Method	Everyday spoken language Culture: history, geography, everyday life of TL speakers	Associate meaning with the TL directly	Use spoken language in situations with no native-language translation
Audio-Lingual Method	Sentence and sound patterns	Overcome native language habits; form new TL habits	Conduct oral/aural drills and pattern practice
Cognitive Code Approach	Grammar rules	Form and test hypotheses to discover and acquire TL rules	Do inductive/deductive grammar exercises
Silent Way	Unique spirit/melody	Develop inner criteria for correctness by becoming aware of how the TL works	Remain silent in order to subordinate teaching to learning. Focus student attention; provide meaningful practice
Desuggestopedia	Whole, meaningful texts; vocabulary emphasized	Overcome psychological barriers to learning	Desuggest limitations: teach lengthy dialogs through musical accompaniment, playful practice, and the arts
Community Language Learning	Student generated	Learn nondefensively as whole persons, following developmental stages	Include the elements of security, attention, aggression, reflection, retention, discrimination
Comprehension Approach: Natural Approach, the Learnables, and Total Physical Response	Vehicle for communicating meaning; vocabulary emphasized	Listen; associate meaning with TL directly	Delay speaking until students are ready; make meaning clear through actions and visuals
Communicative Language Teaching	Communicative competence Notions/functions Authentic discourse	Interact with others in the TL; negotiate meaning	Use information gaps, role plays, games
Content-based, Task-based, and Participatory Approaches	Medium for doing/learning	Attend to what is being communicated, not the language itself, except when form-focused	Engage students in learning other subject matter, tasks, or in problem-solving around issues in their lives
Learning Strategy Training, Cooperative Learning, and Multiple Intelligences		Learn how to learn	Teach learning strategies, cooperation; use a variety of activities that appeal to different intelligences

Figure 7: Summary of teaching methods (source Larsen-Freeman, 2000:178)

4.11. Teaching methods and techniques and primary school learners

The way children learn depends on their developmental stage. It is not reasonable to ask a child to do a task that requires a skill that he or she has not developed yet (Phillips, 1993). Younger learners do not treat the language as an abstract system, but they "respond to language according to what it does or what they can do with it." (Phillips, 1993:7)

It is important to bear in mind that the activities for primary school children should be largely orally based. With very young children (1^{st}-3^{rd} grade) listening activities will "take up a large proportion of class time." (Phillips, 2003:7) On the basis of that, the grammar-translation method is not appropriate for teaching learners in the primary school because there is not enough interaction. The teacher is the authority and the only skills that are emphasized are reading and writing.

Furthermore, the direct method is appropriate both for very young learners and for older young learners (4^{th}-8^{th} grade) in the primary school because they actively participate in the lesson and learn how to communicate in the target language without translating. Of course, the activities should be adapted to their level of knowledge, i.e. writing activities may be offered to older young learners who are already proficient in reading and writing, while carefully tailored and reduced to minimum with very young learners who are still struggling with the reading and writing proficiency in their mother tongue.

Total physical response activities are definitely the most appropriate for very young learners, but also for older young learners because children learn easily through physical activities. Phillips (2003:7) also recommends games and songs with actions, tasks that involve coloring, cutting and pasting and simple repetitive speaking activities as the activities that work well and "have an obvious communicative value." This also means that CLL and CLT and other methodological innovations belong to the group of appropriate teaching methods for the primary school learners. Similarly, the audio-lingual method could work well with very young learners because they could still form new habits in the target language and overcome the old habits of their native language.

However, as children grow up, they gain more intellectual, motor and social skills that help in the process of acquiring anew language. This means that all four skills should be developed and that methods such as the silent way could be used.

5. Research

The following chapter is a presentation of research conducted among the pre-service teachers on their beliefs about teaching English in primary schools. The instruments employed were a questionnaire and a structured interview. It is important to mention that none of the participants attended any practical courses in English or had any previous teaching experience. Exceptions are a small number of students who took part in the elective course *Teaching English to Young Learners* and thus had some first-hand experience in teaching1st-3rd graders in the primary school.

5.1. Aim

The aim of this research is to find out what the pre-service English teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning English in primary school are. The research questions to be answered are:

1. Is there a difference between female and male participants' beliefs about teaching techniques?

2. Is there a difference between female and male participant's beliefs about child development?

3. Is there a difference between the 1st and the 2nd year of graduate students' beliefs about teaching techniques?

4. Is there a difference between the 1st and the 2nd year of graduate students' beliefs about child development?

5. Is there a difference in the beliefs about the teaching techniques between the pre-service teachers who took the course *Teaching English to Young Learners* and those who did not?

6. Is there a difference in the beliefs about the nature of child development between the pre-service teachers who took the course *Teaching English to Young Learners* and those who did not?

It is to be expected that there is no difference in beliefs between female and male pre-service teachers. However, we hypothesize that the academic year and the choice of the elective study courses do have the influence on their perceptions.

5.2. Participants

A total of 46 pre-service English teachers are the subjects of this study. 23 of them are currently enrolled in the 1st year of graduate studies, while the other half are students of the 2nd year of graduate studies. 65% of the participants from the 1st year are female, and 35% are male. However, a more balanced ratio is evident among the 2nd year graduates, where 52% of the participants are female and 48% are male. Figure 8 shows the ratio of the 2nd year graduate participants to non-participants in the elective course *Teaching English to Young Learners*.

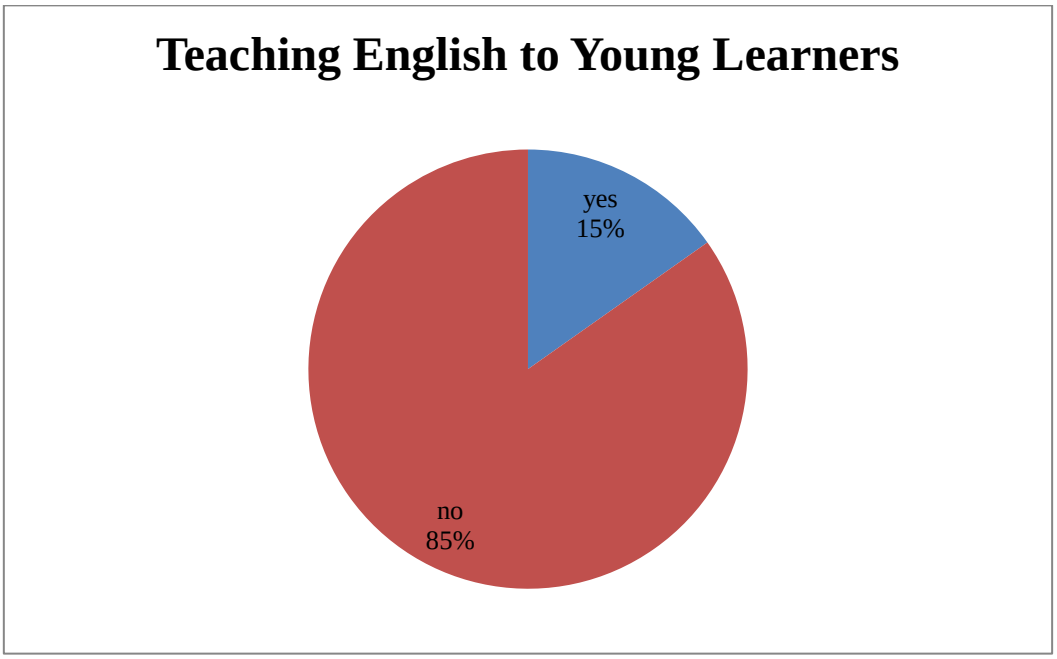


Figure 8: Teaching English to Young Learners

5.3. Instruments and procedure

5.3.1. Questionnaire

The Questionnaire on Pre-service English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs (developed by Shinde and Karekatti, 2010, on the basis of related questionnaires (Horwitz, 1987; Hsieh, Chang, 2002; Oxford, 1990; Yang, 2000) was used - 18 items were excluded and Part A (Personal information) was added for the purposes of this research.

The questionnaire consisted of Part A: Personal information (age, gender, year of study, training) and Part B: 30 questions divided into two categories:

1. The nature of a child's development in English (items 1-13)
2. Teaching methods and techniques (items 14-30)

The five-point Likert scale was used and participants were asked to show their beliefs by indicating the extent to which they agreed with each statement using (1) = strongly disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = neither agree nor disagree, (4) = agree, or (5) = strongly agree. The subjects were informed about this study and all of them agreed to participate. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire is .720, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics, descriptives and statistical tests (Independent Samples t-test).

5.3.2. Interview

In order to find out more about the specific field of teaching English to young learners and to get qualitative data, a structured interview was carried out with the pre-service teachers who were enrolled in the course *Teaching English to Young Learners*. It is to be expected that the participants will give the answers that will prove that this course influenced their beliefs and perceptions. The interview questions were sent out to 5 participants, 4 female and 1 male, via e-mail. As they also participated in the questionnaire, the participants were already acquainted with the aim and the details of the research. They were asked to answer three questions:

1. What were your beliefs and perceptions about teaching English to young learners before you took the course *Teaching English to Young Learners*?
2. Describe your experience with this course.
3. Have your beliefs and perceptions about teaching young learners changed after this course and how?

The participants were willing to help and gave useful answers. The results are to be discussed hereafter.

5.4. Results

5.4.1. Questionnaire

The first instrument that was used was a questionnaire and the results are the following: Table 1 shows descriptive analysis of the items that are connected to the nature of a child's development in English. The mean values in Table 1 show that the participants mostly agree (mean >4) with the items of this part of the questionnaire. There are thirteen items in this part. The item that states that it is important to teach listening and speaking skills has the highest mean value (4.73, SD=.49147), so it can be concluded that the majority of the participants agree with it. However, the majority of them generally do not agree with the statement that children learn English the same way they learn Croatian and, because of that, the mean value for that item is the lowest (2.23, SD=.87394). On the basis of the theory of child development, these results were expected. The results show that pre-service teachers are aware of the individual differences and that it is better to start learning a language as early as possible because children learn faster than adults do.

Table 1: The nature of a child's development in English

The nature of a child's development in English	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Every child can learn English well	46	1.00	5.00	3.2609	1.18199
It is best to learn English from the 1st grade	46	1.00	5.00	4.1087	1.19682
It is important to teach listening and speaking skills	46	3.00	5.00	4.7391	.49147
Every child learns with different learning styles	46	2.00	5.00	4.3913	.82941
Children acquire English easily through various activities	46	3.00	5.00	4.2826	.77926
How they use their mother tongue will affect their capabilities to learn English	46	1.00	5.00	3.5000	.93690
They learn better if they fully understand the content of the lesson	46	2.00	5.00	3.9565	.89335
Children learn faster than adults do	46	1.00	5.00	3.9348	1.06254
The earlier English is taught to children, the better the results	46	2.00	5.00	4.0870	.96208
There is less opportunity for children to learn English without regular practice	46	1.00	5.00	3.9783	1.04327
Children have individual variations in their cognitive development processes	46	3.00	5.00	4.3043	.62786
Children learn English through interactions with other people	46	2.00	5.00	4.1522	.84241
Children learn English the same way they learn Croatian	46	1.00	4.00	2.2391	.87394
Valid N (listwise)	46				

The second part of the questionnaire was connected to teachers' beliefs about the use of different teaching methods and techniques. Table 2 represents the results for seventeen items from that part of the questionnaire. The subjects of this research gave very interesting responses to these items. The majority of them think that children should be given more chance to speak and take action in the class (4.61, SD=.53658) and that incorporating games into English classes can facilitate children's learning (4.54, SD=.62206). However, the questionnaire item 15 (see Appendix) that says that grammar is the most important element in teaching English has the lowest mean value (2.47, SD=.96007). Bearing in mind the above mentioned results (see Table 1) and the aforementioned theory of teaching methods and techniques, it can be concluded that the participants would prefer TPR, the direct method, the audio-lingual method or community language learning. Given the fact that teaching grammar has the lowest mean values, they would not prefer the grammar-translation method.

Table 2: Teaching techniques

Teaching techniques	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
It is important for primary school children to read and write in English	46	2.00	5.00	3.7609	.94715
The most important element in teaching English is grammar	46	1.00	4.00	2.4783	.96007
Pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar should be taught in an integrative manner, rather than separately	46	2.00	5.00	3.9130	.89010
The most important element in teaching English is oral conversation	46	1.00	5.00	3.7826	.89226
Teaching English through English is better than the bilingual method of using both Croatian and English	46	1.00	5.00	3.3478	.94792
Children learn English better if they are given opportunities to move around in the classroom	46	2.00	5.00	3.5435	0.88711
The most important element in teaching English is vocabulary	46	1.00	5.00	3.1522	1.01033
It is important to use multimedia equipment in teaching English	46	3.00	5.00	4.1739	.73950
I agree that children should not be punished for making mistakes while learning English	46	1.00	5.00	4.2609	1.16304
Children should be given more chances to speak and take action in classes	46	3.00	5.00	4.6087	.53658
Croatian should be used while teaching English to children	46	2.00	5.00	3.3478	0.89981
If children are permitted to make mistakes without the teacher correcting them, it will be more difficult to correct them later on	46	1.00	5.00	3.7174	1.14820
	46	2.00	5.00	4.2391	.84813

Singing and role-playing are appropriate English teaching activities					
The most important element in teaching English is pronunciation	46	1.00	5.00	2.8913	.87504
Teachers should correct mistakes learners make	46	2.00	5.00	3.9130	.75502
I agree that it is not necessary to teach spelling and grammar in the very beginning	46	1.00	5.00	3.3696	.97431
Incorporating games into English classes can facilitate children's learning	46	3.00	5.00	4.5435	.62206
Valid N (listwise)	46				

Next, in order to answer the specific research questions, Independent Samples t-tests were done. The first question to answer is whether there is a difference between female and male's beliefs about teaching techniques. The results of this t-test are shown in Table 3. It can be seen that there is no significant difference in means for female and male participants. The same test was done to answer whether there is a difference between female and male's beliefs about child development. These results are shown in Table 4. On the basis of these results, it is visible that female and male participants have the same set of beliefs when it comes to the teaching techniques and child's development in English.

Table 3: t-test – female and male beliefs about teaching techniques

	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Male	3.5956	0.35956	-1.033	44	0.307
Female	3.6959	0.29785			

Table 4: t-test – female and male beliefs about child development

	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Male	4.0383	0.45988	-0.159	27.815	0.875
Female	4.0572	0.28764			

This research also intended to establish if there is a difference between the 1st and the 2nd year graduate students' beliefs about teaching techniques and child development in English. The results of the t-tests that were done in order to answer these questions, which can be seen in Table 5 and the Table 6, show that the year of study does not affect their beliefs.

Table 5: t-test – 1st and 2nd year students' beliefs about teaching techniques

	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
1st year	3.5812	0.29453	-1.553	44	0.128
2nd year	3.7277	0.34317			

Table 6: t-test – 1st and 2nd year students' beliefs about child development

	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
1st year	3.9605	0.37365	-1.691	44	0.098
2nd year	4.1383	0.3389			

Furthermore, using the Independent t-test, it was found out that there is a difference in the beliefs about the teaching techniques and the nature of child development in English between the pre-service teachers who took the elective course and those who did not. Table 7 shows that there is a significant difference in means when it comes to the beliefs about the teaching techniques of the pre-service teachers who took the elective course and those who did not.

Table 7: Independent samples t-test for the (non-)participants in the elective course and their beliefs about the teaching methods and techniques

course	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
yes	3.8195	0.13541	2.603	22.746	0.016*
no	3.6248	0.3407			

There is also a significant difference in means in the beliefs about the nature of child's development in English between the two groups of participants (p=0.037), as it can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8: Independent samples t-test for the (non-)participants in the elective course and their beliefs about the nature of child's development in English

course	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
yes	4.3117	0.22792	2.152	44	0.037*
no	4.0023	0.36572			

5.4.2. Interview

Instrument 2 was a structured interview that consisted of 3 questions that were sent via e-mail to 5 participants who were enrolled in the course *Teaching English to Young Learners.* The choice of the participants was based on their prior teaching experience and the results of the t-test. The T-test showed that there is a significant difference in means when it comes to the beliefs about the teaching techniques of the pre-service teachers who took the elective course and those who did not. The test also showed a significant difference in means in the beliefs about the nature of child's development in English between the two groups of the participants (p=0.037), as it can be seen in Table 8. In order to collect qualitative data, the participants were asked to express their beliefs and perceptions about teaching English to young learners before they took the course *Teaching English to Young Learners*. The answers to this question were quite similar among all participants. Participant 1 revealed:

"At first I was a bit frightened to teach young learners because I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that young learners require a special approach and a lot of patience" (E-mail interview, 2016).

Participant 2 expressed some insecurities and fears in more detail, although she was looking forward to teaching young learners.

"I was really looking forward to working with young learners but, I was also a bit worried about what it would all look like in a real classroom situation, about how difficult it would be to motivate the learners, how cooperative they would be and how able I would be to explain what I had to, in the way that they can understand" (E-mail interview, 2016).

After sharing the perceptions that pre-service teachers had had before taking the elective course, the participants were asked to describe their first-hand teaching experience with young learners during the course. Participant 1 simply concluded: "This course was really helpful to me" (E-mail

interview, 2016). Furthermore, Participant 2 gave insight into the theoretical part that served as the introduction to the practical part of the course:

"We had received sufficient instruction in the theoretical part to prepare us for what was waiting in the school. Out teacher explained what was expected of us in detail, and what kids at a certain level of knowledge (and age) can or cannot do/understand. She gave us a lot of advice on why and how to use realia, pictures, and word cards, etc. while introducing new words" (E-mail interview, 2016).

However, Participant 3 could not see herself working with young learners:

"I am too serious a person and it was very hard to imagine myself in a situation where I have to gesticulate and laugh a lot, but that is exactly the reason why I wanted this course…and it was a very pleasant experience" (E-mail interview, 2016).

Participant 4 enjoyed the experience and shared the following impressions: "I had the opportunity to see my colleague students teach as well and pick up great ideas for teaching (and to see what should and should not be done in the classroom)" (E-mail interview, 2016).

In the end, they were asked after the enrollment in the course to estimate whether and to what extent there was a change in their beliefs and perceptions about teaching young learners. Participant 5 concluded that his beliefs had changed in a positive way, whereas Participant 1 claimed not to have fears of teaching young learners anymore. All the participants agreed that teaching young learners takes a lot of patience (E-mail interview, 2016). However, Participant 3 still had the same set of beliefs and said:

"They have not changed a lot. I still think you have to put a great amount of energy in it…not just intellectual, but also physical. You need to change activities very often and keep them interested all the time" (E-mail interview, 2016).

It can be concluded that all the participants had had similar beliefs about teaching young learners before they took this course and that their thoughts changed in a positive way. They all had a pleasant experience, but some of them did not see themselves teaching young learners.

5.5. Discussion

This research examined the beliefs of pre service teachers about teaching English to young learners. The overall results indicate that gender does not influence the pre-service teachers' beliefs because there is no significant difference in means between female and male beliefs about teaching techniques and child development. Our first initial research hypothesis is herewith confirmed. However, our second research hypothesis is rejected because there is no significant difference in means between the 1st and the 2nd year students' beliefs about teaching techniques and child development, which is proof that the year of study is not the important variable in these questions. However, our third initial hypothesis is confirmed by the research findings which point to significant difference in means when it comes to the beliefs about the teaching techniques and the nature of the child's development in English among the pre-service teachers who took the elective course and those who did not. Most of the participants agreed with the items 7-13 (see Apendix), showing that their beliefs are in accordance with Vygotsky's and Piage's theories of child development. Vygotsky's attitude towards the importance of social component of child development is supported by the participants' agreement with the item 12 which states that children learn best through interaction with other people. Moreover, Piaget's developmental theory is also supported by the participants agreement with the item 11 which states that children have individual variations in their cognitive development processes. On the basis of the overall questionnaire results, it could be concluded that under the influence of the elective course Teaching English to Young Learners some aspects of the already formed set of pre-service teachers' beliefs are susceptible to change.

6. Conclusion

The study set out to explore pre-service teachers' beliefs about teaching English to primary school children. Teachers' beliefs are one of the most important factors that influence the way the teachers work in the classroom. A total of 46 pre-service English teachers were the subjects of this study. It is important to mention that the majority of the participants did not have any previous teaching experience. The participants who took the elective course *Teaching English to Young Learners* had a teaching experience with young learners (1st-3rd grade). The instruments employed in the study were The Questionnaire on Pre-service English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs and a structured e-mail interview.

The results of the research show that, when it comes to the beliefs about child development and teaching methods and techniques, there is no difference between female and male participants, and no difference between the 1st and the 2nd year students' beliefs. However, the participants who had some teaching experience while enrolled in the elective course *Teaching English to Young Learners* were more inclined to choose the upper part of the Likert scale in their responses to the questionnaire items. The same students were later interviewed via e-mail about their experience with the course and they all agreed that it was a valuable experience. The practical part resolved many doubts regarding the beliefs about teaching methods and techniques, cast away some personal fears and insecurities, and showed marked enthusiasm for the teaching profession.

The overall results show that most of the pre-service teachers have common beliefs about child development and teaching techniques that are in accordance with the literature on second/foreign language learning and the teaching principles of TPR, CLT and CLL. Additionally, the pre-service teachers' responses showed high enthusiasm towards teaching primary school students as well as revealed some insecurities regarding their own readiness to teach. This calls for designing teacher-training programmes based on the investigated beliefs and their suggestions.

The pre-service teachers' belief system might be attributed to the following factors: (i) life-in-school experiences; (ii) past school experiences; (iii) life-out-of-school experiences; (iv) current socio cultural context; (v) curriculum design and objectives; (vi) educational paradigm; (vii) lack of teaching practice. Raising awareness of the importance of pre-service teachers' beliefs and incorporating more practice into the current teacher training programme, may contribute to a better overall preparation for the future challenges and demands of the real-life classroom setting.

In order to be able to understand the causal relationships between the aforementioned factors, we need more experimental studies. As a continuation of this study, we would recommend a further research into the belief system of the same participants over a period of time, which would undeniably offer valuable insights into the (in)flexibility of teachers' beliefs and more in-depth analysis into the variables of teaching experience, contemporary educational paradigm and the actual classroom setting. In the future research, the following questions could be raised: (i) Have pre-service teachers changed their beliefs about teaching under the influence of the contemporary educational paradigm?, (ii) What factors have had most influence on their belief system?, (iii) To what extent do their beliefs influence their teaching performance, the choice of teaching methods and techniques?

However, the conclusions drawn upon this research may not be completely reliable. There are limitations to this research that need to be taken into account. The study included a relatively small number of participants and therefore its results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, the research may serve as a possible guideline for Croatian curriculum designers and policy makers when it comes to successful implementation of the research findings into the Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) MA programme.

Finally, we encourage future researchers to include belief system analysis in the TEFL MA programme and thereby encourage greater reflective practice and initiate inquiry into the fundamental purpose of education.

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8. Appendix

The Questionnaire on Pre-Service English Teachers' Teaching Beliefs

** The aim of this research is to find out what the pre-service English teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning English in primary school are*
**All the questions are about teaching English to primary school students (1st-4th grade)*
**Your answers are valuable. Please be frank while answering each question. The data collected will be kept confidential and will be used only for research purposes.*

Part A: Personal information

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1. Age: _____
2. Year of study: 1st year of graduate studies 2nd year of graduate studies
3. Gender: M F
4. Did you enroll the *Teaching English to Young Learners* course? YES NO
5. Have you received any additional training on how to teach English to primary school learners?
   YES (Please specify:
   _____)
   NO

Part B: The Questionnaire

Instructions: Tick the alternative that best describes your opinion.

1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree

SN	QUESTIONS	1	2	3	4	5
1	Every child can learn English well.					
2	It is the best for children to learn English from as early as the 1st grade.					
3	It is important to teach primary school children listening and speaking skills.					
4	Every child learns English with different learning styles in the classroom.					
5	Children acquire English easily when they are doing various activities.					

6	How children use their mother tongue will affect their capabilities to learn English.					
7	Children can learn English better if they fully understand the content of the lesson.					
8	Children learn English faster than adults do.					
9	The earlier English is taught to children, the better the results.					
10	Children cannot learn English without regular practice.					
11	Children have individual variations in their cognitive development processes.					
12	Children learn English through interactions with other people.					
13	Children learn English the same way they learn Croatian.					
14	It is important for primary school children to read and write in English.					
15	The most important element in teaching English is grammar.					
16	Pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar should be taught in an integrative manner, rather than separately.					
17	The most important element in teaching English is oral conversation.					
18	Teaching English through English is more effective than the bilingual method of using both Croatian and English.					
19	Children learn English better if they are given opportunities to move around in the classroom.					
20	The most important element in teaching English is vocabulary.					
21	It is important to use multimedia equipment (audio, video) in teaching English.					

22	Children should not be punished for making mistakes while learning English.					
23	Children should be given more chances to speak and take action in classes.					
24	Croatian should be used while teaching English to children.					
25	If children are permitted to make mistakes without the teacher’s correcting, it will be more difficult to correct the mistakes later on.					

26	Singing and role-playing are appropriate English teaching activities.					
27	The most important element in teaching English is pronunciation.					
28	The teacher should correct the mistakes learners make.					
29	It is not necessary to teach spelling and grammar in the very beginning.					
30	Incorporating games into English classes can facilitate children's learning.					