The Attitudes of Parents Towards Early Foreign Language Learning

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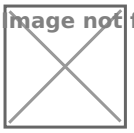
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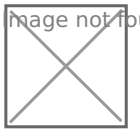


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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The Attitudes of Parents towards Early Foreign Language Learning

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. in English Language and Literature and Italian Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor: Dr Tihana Kraš

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Abstract

This thesis reports the results of a study which explores the attitudes of Croatian parents towards early foreign language learning. More precisely, the aims were to determine whether Croatian parents have positive attitudes towards early foreign learning, whether they consider English as more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school, and if there is a relationship between parents' age, level of education, the number of foreign languages they know and their previous experience of foreign language learning in school, and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. The sample consisted of 110 parents of children who attend Croatian elementary schools. Parents' attitudes were explored through an online questionnaire, which is an adaptation of the fourth part of a questionnaire used in the Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE) project (Enever, 2011). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, parents were asked to evaluate 19 statements about early foreign language learning and six statements about the relationship between English and other school subjects in the first four grades of elementary school on a five-point Likert scale. Parents were also required to say whether they inform themselves about early foreign language learning and how they do it. The second part of the questionnaire focused on the socio-demographic and other parent-related variables relevant for the study. The results showed that Croatian parents have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning, but that they do not consider English as more relevant that other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school. Weak and inconsistent relationships between parents' age, level of education, the number of foreign languages they speak and their experience of foreign language learning in school and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning were discovered, which calls for further research.

Keywords: early foreign language learning, parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning, Croatia

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1. Introduction

The knowledge of a second or a foreign language is considered to be the key to the successful functioning in today's globalized world (Butler, 2015) in which there is an ever-increasing mobility between countries for a variety of reasons: tourism, work, education or social reasons (Enever, 2011). Because of this, the policymakers of many countries, including the majority of 28 European Union member countries (including Croatia), have decided to lower the start age for foreign language learning in elementary school during the past 20 years (Enever, 2011). The ultimate aim of such a decision is to enable and facilitate the development of plurilingual competence in children, which is competence, albeit only partial, in a few languages (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2015, p. 457). Plurilingual competence needs to be distinguished from bilingual competence, which, according to Grosjean (2008, p. 14) means to possess "unique linguistic configuration and to be a fully competent speaker-hearer [in two or more languages]". As opposed to this, the notion of plurilingualism simply "recognizes the coexistence of two or more languages" in the speaker's language repertoire without imposing the requirement for a very high level of competence in these languages (Patekar, Vičević Ivanović, & Košuta, 2016, p. 3).

Furthermore, the implementation of early foreign language instruction should eventually lead to the maintenance and promotion of the most prominent values of the globalized world, namely respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, mutual respect, social cohesion and sense of solidarity (Lujić, 2017). In situations when foreign language learning takes place in the elementary school classroom, "the younger the better" refers to the development of an enthusiasm for learning languages, as well as to the awakening of "children's interests in other people and cultures at a time when they are open and receptive" (Myles, 2012, p. 4). In such

programs, “attitudes towards other languages and cultures are formed, and the foundations for later language learning are laid” (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006, p. 240). The use of a foreign language during early foreign language learning is limited to simple everyday language and play, which leads more quickly to a feeling of success and a sense of accomplishment needed for the development of motivation for foreign language learning (Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009). Besides, one of the main aims of foreign language learning is to be able to communicate in a foreign language, and it has been shown that good communicative competence develops more efficiently at an early age due to children’s marked willingness to communicate, instinct for interaction and affinity and ability for phonological imitation (Akbayeva, Ospanova, Kagazbayev, Tazhibayeva, & Eskazinova, 2015; Halliwell, 1992; Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009).

However, it is important to emphasize that when it comes to foreign language learning in the institutionalized setting, “the younger the better” does not mean faster linguistic progress as it is the case with the naturalistic setting, where there is greater exposure to a foreign language (Myles, 2012). Due to the fact that institutionalized foreign language learning is characterized by “very limited amounts of curricular time [devoted] to foreign languages” (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006, p. 241), the critical period hypothesis, that is “the claim that there is […] an optimal period for language acquisition, ending at puberty” (Abello-Contesse, 2009, p. 170), cannot be tested in foreign language learning contexts. In the case of foreign language learning, an early start is beneficial because it “contributes to young learners’ [positive] attitudes and motivation, which later ensure good proficiency” (Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2006, p. 242). In order to ensure an effective learning of a foreign language in the early stages of elementary school education, it is crucial to investigate factors that influence the process, such as

the language policy of a country, the curricula, the atmosphere in the classroom, the teacher, individual characteristics of children and the home environment (Gardner, 2007). Positive attitudes of parents towards early foreign language learning and their understanding of values of plurilingualism are an essential factor for the development of plurilingualism in the institutionalized foreign language learning (Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009). In addition to positive parental attitudes, positive attitudes and support of state institutions are also listed as important factors for effective early foreign language teaching and learning (Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009). Epstein (1987, as cited in McLendon Cansler, 2008), in his Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, summarizes these factors in three overlapping spheres of influence in a child's life: parents, school and community. Each of the spheres affects the child's education. The sphere that represents parents, their attitudes and beliefs, should be analyzed in detail, as parents are the first teachers of the child (McLendon Cansler, 2008). For this reason, numerous studies dealing with parental attitudes towards foreign language learning have been conducted, documenting in the majority of cases a direct correlation between the attitudes of parents towards foreign language learning and children's motivation, behavior and performance in the foreign language classroom (McLendon Cansler, 2008).

This thesis deals with parental attitudes towards early foreign language learning in Croatia. It reports on the results of a questionnaire-based study, the participants of which were 110 parents of children who attend elementary school. The purpose of the study was to find out if parents in Croatia have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning, if they consider English as more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school and to see whether the socio-demographic variables of parents' age and level of education are related to their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. In addition, the

aim was to determine whether there is a relationship between the number of foreign languages spoken by parents and parents' previous experience of foreign language learning in school, and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. Some of these relationships were not examined in previous research, at least not in the Croatian context

The structure of the thesis is as follows. In Chapter 2 and 3 respectively, some of the previous research on early foreign language learning as well as the attitudes of parents towards early foreign language learning is reviewed. Chapter 4 contains a short historical overview of (early) foreign language education in Croatia, since the implementation of compulsory foreign language learning from the first grade of elementary school in 2003. In Chapter 5, the methodology and the results of the present study are described. The results are discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 contains some concluding remarks.

2. Previous research on early foreign language learning

In Croatia, research on institutionalized early foreign language learning began in the 1970s and it culminated in the 1990s (Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009). One of the most important studies dealing with early foreign language learning in Croatia is the so-called Zagreb project, a ten-year long longitudinal study that lasted from 1991 until 2001 and which was conducted as a part of the medium-term Council of Europe program called Language Learning for European Citizenship (Mihaljević Djigunović & Medved Krajnović, 2014). The research team led by Marijana Vilke and Yvonne Vrhovac sought to find out what the optimal age for introducing foreign language learning in Croatian elementary schools is. The results of the study showed that the optimal age is "the beginning of formal education", that is the first grade of elementary school (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012a, p. 4). Additionally, the study identified three conditions which should be met so that early foreign language learning can reach its full potential, namely intensive foreign language teaching in the first few grades, small groups of learners and foreign language teachers specifically educated to work with children (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012a). None of the conditions has been met since the implementation of compulsory foreign language instruction from the first grade of elementary school in Croatia in 2003. However, a more recent study conducted by Mihaljević Djigunović, Nikolov and Ottó (2008) rejected the conclusions of the Zagreb project. The aim of this study was to find out whether Croatian and Hungarian eighth-graders differ with respect to their proficiency in English as a foreign language taking the starting age of foreign language learning, the frequency of weekly classes of English and the number of students in the English language classroom into consideration. The results have shown that Croatian students outperform Hungarian ones despite

the fact that the latter started learning English earlier, in more weekly classes and in smaller groups.

As part of her case study from 2012 dealing with early foreign language learning, Mihaljević Djigunović (2012a) investigated the opinions of teachers of English in 76 elementary schools in Croatia about the ideal start age for introducing foreign language learning. She discovered that all teachers who participated in the study found Grade One as the appropriate time to start foreign language learning. Some of the teachers agreed that an earlier start would be an even better. The main argument for such opinion was the fact that early foreign language learning is "a good investment for later [language] learning" (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012a, p. 9).

Nikolov (2000a, in Turányi, 2016) also highlights the importance and value of early foreign language learning. According to her, it encourages the understanding, appreciation and respect for different cultures as well as the development of positive attitude towards the speakers of foreign languages.

Myles (2012) discovered a high level of enthusiasm and motivation present in children aged five and seven who were learning French in England. Accordingly, he concluded that an hour of foreign language per week is enough to awaken in children "a lifelong interest in foreign languages" (Myles, 2012, p. 4). Findings of the project *Acquisition of English from an Early Age: Analysis of Learner Language*, the aim of which was to explain the processes of early foreign language development in elementary school learners, corroborated Myles's (2012) findings and showed that, during all three years, a higher level of motivation was observed among younger beginners than among older beginners (Mihaljević Djigunović & Medved

Krajnović, 2014). All of the findings are therefore in line with one of the most widely acknowledged aims of early foreign language learning and that is the development of positive attitudes towards foreign languages in general as well as the motivation for learning foreign languages (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012b). However, Myles (2012, p. 4) adds that if enthusiasm and motivation are to persist, "they require nurturing". In other words, children must have the adequate support from a foreign language teacher as well as from their parents to maintain enthusiasm and motivation for foreign language learning throughout their elementary school education.

Gilzow and Rhodes (2000) show how beneficial early foreign language learning can be with regards to the development of children's motivation for language learning in general, emphasizing three main arguments in favor of introducing foreign language learning in the first grade of elementary school. In the first place, there is a formation of a positive attitude towards learning further languages, followed by the broadening of children's world-views and an improvement of cognitive skills. When it comes to the benefits in the cognitive domain, Gilzow and Rhodes (2000, p. 4) highlight "the increased problem-solving ability and creativity of early starters".

Curtain (1990, p. 23) argues that the reason for which early foreign language learning enhances children's cognitive development lies in the fact that children, when they are exposed to a foreign language at school, "experience a learning strategy that is foreign to their area of understanding" and this conflict, in turn, stimulates the development of new mechanisms of thinking and encourages children to form "fruitful links between a foreign language and their first language". This fits into Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, in which he states that the exposure to a new idea, concept or experience becomes the incentive for new ways of

thinking (Curtain, 1990). This cognitive conflict was also argued to have a positive impact on the development of a first language, which is, according to Nikolov and Mihaljević Djigunović (2011, p. 98), "the most desirable and fascinating outcome" in the process of early foreign language learning.

The results of a large-scale longitudinal study conducted in Louisiana by Taylor and Lafayette in 2010 provided another strong argument for early exposure to a foreign language. The researchers found that early exposure to a foreign language boosts children's general school achievement mostly because of the more developed metalinguistic awareness, which is again the consequence of the formation of links between a foreign and the first language that occurs during the process of foreign language learning (Taylor & Lafayette, 2010).

Finally, in the Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE) project, researchers from England, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Croatia, conducted a longitudinal study which investigated the effectiveness of the teaching of languages to young learners in elementary schools during three years, starting with 2007 (Enever, 2011). The purpose of the study was to inform educational policymaking in Europe and possibly even worldwide. Research teams did not initially assume that earlier necessarily means better, but they did eventually conclude that "early exposure to a target language will have excellent results in the right circumstances" (Enever, 2011, p. 1). They emphasized the importance of the specifically trained and qualified teachers and of children's out-of-school experience for successful early language learning.

Nonetheless, despite the attempts of researches to analyze and explain the process of early foreign language learning, some of the key issues in the field have not yet been resolved.

One of the crucial issues that, especially in Croatia, needs further investigation, are the attitudes of parents as one of the stakeholders in children's education towards early foreign language learning. In general, more research is needed in order to prevent policymakers and stakeholders from making decisions on the basis of vague ideas, making children miss opportunities for learning in foreign language settings (Mihaljević Djigunović & Medved Krajnović, 2014).

3. Previous research on the attitudes of parents towards early foreign language learning

As stated in Chapter 1, parents are important decision-makers when it comes to implementing foreign languages in the curricula, so their attitudes need to be taken into consideration when "planning or executing foreign language learning for young children" (Dragarin Fojkar & Pižorn, 2014, p. 9). It is important to investigate the attitudes of parents because of the influence parents have on the formation of children's attitudes. As Mihaljević Djigunović (2012a) states, most studies focusing on young learners' attitudes suggest that children usually adopt attitudes of people who are considered as their significant others. Thus, if parents believe that early learning of a foreign language is important and beneficial for the children, then the children too will have a positive attitude towards foreign language learning (Bartram, 2006), which will eventually raise their motivation. More precisely, positive attitudes towards a foreign language lead to a desire to learn this foreign language. This, in turn, results in motivation intensity, which eventually leads to success in foreign language learning (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995, as cited in in Penjak & Karninčić, 2015). On the other hand, some parents might base their opinions about early foreign language instruction on claims such as "early foreign language learning is additional burden for children", "early foreign language learning causes confusion in the process of first language acquisition", "young learners are cognitively immature for foreign language learning", etc. (Griva & Chouvarda, 2012). Those parents who have negative attitudes towards early foreign language rarely show support to their children in foreign language education and this in turn negatively affects the child's motivation for language learning and his/her achievements in the foreign language classroom (Bartram, 2006).

Although Croatia has a long and internationally acknowledged tradition of studies examining the process of early foreign language learning and teaching (Mihaljević Djigunović & Medved Krajnović, 2014), not many studies investigated the attitudes of parents towards (early) foreign language learning. An exception was the study conducted within the ELLiE research project (Enever, 2011), which, besides describing and analyzing early foreign language learning contexts in different elementary schools all across Europe, aimed to examine "the influence of out-of-school exposure as well as home-related factors on young learners" (Enever, 2011, p. 106). The attitudes of parents towards early foreign language learning were one of the home-related factors that were analyzed.

Particularly relevant for the research conducted within the ELLie project, was Bartram's study from 2006, in which he examined parental influence on children's attitudes towards language learning. Participants in the study were 411 pupils who were learning French, English or German as foreign languages in schools in England, Germany and The Netherlands. Bartram selected half of the participants and asked them to generate written accounts of their attitudes towards foreign language learning as well as of the factors they considered influential. He demonstrated there is an influence of parental attitudes, "both in positive and negative ways, on children's orientation toward foreign language learning" (Enever, p. 106). Particularly important were parents' contributions to the development of their children's understanding of language utility (Enever, 2011). Bartram's conclusions were corroborated by Adachi's survey analyses from 2011, in which he showed that if the attitudes of children's significant others are positive, their willingness to communicate in a foreign language as well as their motivation for foreign language learning will be increased (Adachi, 2011).

Medved Krajnović and Letica (2009) also explored the attitudes of parents in Croatia towards early foreign language learning. Participants in their study were 148 parents of children who attended the first or the second grade of a elementary school in Zagreb. Parents had to fill out a questionnaire on their attitudes towards the language their child learned from the first grade (English, German or French) and on their attitudes towards early foreign language learning in general. The results showed that the majority of parents (98%) have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning. Some of the parents supported their answers with additional comments: "young learners have an advantage over older learners because they learn a foreign language through play, which is easier than learning a language from a textbook", "young children can memorize things faster which allows them to learn a foreign language more easily than older learners", "learning a foreign language in the early age serves as a preparation for language learning in the future" (Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009). Medved Krajnović and Letica's study also revealed that parents whose children learn German or French as a first foreign language have an exceptionally positive attitude when it comes to learning more different languages. More precisely, 88% of children who learn French as the first foreign language in school, learn another language (or other languages) besides French. The same is the case for 59% of children who learn German as the first foreign language. It follows from all the above that parents in Croatia have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning and that some encourage the development of plurilingualism in their children.

Another study on this topic was conducted by Knežević and Šenjug Golub in 2015 (Knežević and Šenjug Golub, 2015). The study looked at the attitudes of 120 elementary school learners' parents from northeastern Croatia towards foreign language learning. It was found that parents, in general, have positive attitudes towards (early) foreign language learning. With

regard to socio-demographic variables, the study showed that the level of education was the only variable which was associated with the attitudes of parents: the attitudes of those parents who had a higher level of education were more positive than the attitudes of parents with a lower level of education. According to the authors, this is because more highly educated parents are better informed about the importance of (early) foreign language learning.

Another study on parental attitudes was conducted a year earlier in Slovenia, where the start age for foreign language learning is nine, which is the fourth year of the elementary school there. Dragarin Fojkar and Pižorn (2014) sought to find out what parents and teachers think about children learning a foreign language in the first three grades of elementary school and how important for them is knowing foreign languages. Furthermore, the authors wanted to find out whether there is a correlation between the number of foreign languages that parents know and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. Participants in the study were 263 parents of children who completed the third grade of elementary school and 104 teachers who taught English in the lower grades of elementary school. The majority of parents (70%) had learned either one or two foreign languages. The research instrument was a questionnaire. The results of the study showed that most of the parents considered knowledge of foreign languages to be very important or important. Also, parents who knew more foreign languages had more positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning than parents who knew just one foreign language. When it comes to introducing a foreign language in the first grade, opinions are divided. The authors believe this stems from the fact that parents are afraid their children will be overburdened with an additional language at such an early stage and therefore conclude that parents need to inform themselves about the aims and methods of early foreign language teaching.

Brumen et. al (2017) conducted a study about the encouragement that young foreign language learners in Slovenia receive from their parents. The aim was to identify the role that the socioeconomic status (SES) of a family has on children's foreign language learning in the elementary school. Therefore, the study implicitly explored parental attitudes (expressed through their involvement in children's foreign language learning and modified by SES). Participants in the study were 600 ninth-grade pupils and the data collection method was a questionnaire. The authors found out that SES is a significant variable when it comes to the amount of encouragement that children receive from their parents for learning foreign languages. The study showed that children who come from families with a higher SES receive greater encouragement for learning a foreign language than children who come from families with a middle or lower SES. Researchers point out that it is important to raise parents' (and foreign language teachers') awareness about the importance of support and encouragement in foreign language learning because children who do not get support in foreign language education at home learn fewer foreign languages and less efficiently that their peers who get support from their parents (Jones, 2009, as cited in in Brumen et. al, 2017).

In Greece, foreign language is not a compulsory subject in the first grade of primary school. It is implemented in the elementary school curriculum only in the third grade and from there the need to investigate the attitudes of parents whose beliefs are thought to influence every language policy decision (Griva & Chouvarda, 2012). Griva and Chouvarda (2012) looked at the attitudes of parents towards children's early foreign language education among 50 randomly selected parents of children attending the first or second year of elementary school. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The results of the study showed that the majority of parents believed that it is necessary to speak at least two foreign languages in order to

successfully communicate in a globalized world. When it comes to early (English) foreign language learning, most of the parents agreed with the statement "the earlier the better", while only a small number of parents believed that children need to know their mother tongue at an appropriate level before getting involved in the process of learning another language (Griva & Chouvarda, 2012). Griva and Chouvarda (2012) also discovered significant differences in the opinions of parents in relation to their gender. Namely, male parents were convinced more than the female parents that learning a foreign language is an important tool for their children's future. Another significant variable was the age of parents; the younger parents agreed more than the older parents with the statements that foreign language learning results in the broadening of children's horizons. In conclusion, the majority of the parents declared that they encourage their children to learn foreign languages and that early foreign language learning has a beneficial effect on both children's personality and their prospects for the future.

The present study will elaborate on a part of the previously mentioned ELLiE project (Enever, 2011) that deals with the attitudes of parents as one of the factors that exert direct influence on children involved in the process of early foreign language learning. Socio-demographic variables that will be taken into consideration are age and educational level of parents. In addition, two other variables will be considered: the number of languages spoken by parents and their previous experience of foreign language learning in school.

4. (Early) foreign language education in Croatia

As mentioned in Chapter 1, early foreign language learning is part of the Croatian education policy. Vilke (1993, in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012a) mentions the first half of the 20th century as a significant period for early foreign language in Croatia; from that point on there has been a constant lowering of the starting age at which foreign language learning was introduced into the national school curriculum. With the aim of promoting the concept of linguistic and cultural openness in Croatia, the Zagreb Resolution on Plurilingualism (Cro. *Zagrebačka rezolucija o višejezičnosti*) was signed in 2002. The aim of the document was to raise the public awareness of the importance of plurilingualism for Croatia and to propose possible ways of achieving it. Early learning of foreign languages was mentioned as one of the most important preconditions for the development of plurilinguistic competence in the Croatian society (Petravić, 2018). After that, in 2003, the onset of foreign language learning in Croatia has been shifted from grade four to grade one (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2008). This was followed by the adoption of a document officially named Guidance on the Implementation of the Specific Program of Early Foreign Language Learning in the First Grade and Elective Classes of a Foreign Language in the Fourth Grade of Elementary School in the School year 2003-2004 (Cro. U*pute za provedbu posebnog programa ranog učenja stranog jezika u I. razredu i izborne nastave stranog jezika u IV. razredu osnovne škole u školskoj godini 2003./2004*.). From that point on, Croatia offers eight years of compulsory foreign language learning in elementary education (two hours per week until the fifth grade, when three hours of a foreign language per week are introduced) (Lujić, 2017), plus a second foreign language in the fourth grade, which children can, but are not required, to choose (Patekar et. al, 2016). In the national curriculum, English, French, German, Italian and Russian have been approved as the first or second foreign

language (Karačić, 2009). One of the most important prerequisites for the successful implementation of early foreign language learning in the institutionalized setting in Croatia has been created with the adoption of the National Framework Curriculum (Cro. *Nacionalni okvirni kurikulum*) in 2011 (Knežević & Šenjug Golub, 2015). This document is significant because it emphasizes the importance of developing plurilingual competence. Moreover, it lists eight core competencies for lifelong learning, among which there is also communication in foreign languages. In the description of this competence, plurilingualism and interculturalism are described as crucial concepts for developing tolerance and respect for diversity and for the development of awareness about the importance of foreign language learning (Knežević & Šenjug Golub, 2015).

In 2014, Croatian education system has witnessed heated debates when the Croatian Parliament approved the implementation of Strategy on Education, Science and Technology (Cro. *Strategija obrazovanja, znanosti i tehnologije*) (Jokić, 2017). The first measure that the implementation of the Strategy initiated was the so-called Comprehensive Curricular Reform (Cro. *Cjelovita kurikularna reforma*) (Jokić, 2017). The reform aims to improve the Croatian education system by focusing on the needs of a learner and by promoting lifelong learning. Its focus is on educational outcomes, which are not only of intellectual nature but which also encourage the development of skills, critical thinking, respect for others, etc. As far as foreign languages are concerned, the reform concentrates on three domains: communicative language competence, independence in the mastery of language and cross-cultural communicative competence. The latter domain (i.e. cross-cultural communicative competence) emphasizes the importance of the previously mentioned plurilinguistic competence, which eventually leads to the establishment of harmonious intercultural relationships: sensitivity to diversity and effective

and context-appropriate communication with speakers of other languages. This month, (i.e. September 2018) the experimental stage of the reform has been implemented in 72 Croatian schools, of which 46 are elementary schools and 26 are secondary schools (Blažić et. al, 2016).

It is obvious that there are prerequisites and efforts on the educational level for the effective implementation of (early) foreign language learning in Croatian (elementary) schools. Clearly, the educational policy strives to lay foundations for later language learning, which can be seen from the number of official documents in Croatia that promote foreign language learning.

5. The study

5.1. Research questions and hypotheses

Six research questions were addressed in the study:

1. Do Croatian parents have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning?

2. Do Croatian parents consider English more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school?

3. Is there a relationship between parents' age and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning?

4. Is there a relationship between parents' level of education and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning?

5. Is there a relationship between the number of foreign languages parents speak and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning?

6. Is there a relationship between parents' previous experience of foreign language learning in school and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning?

With respect to these research questions, the following hypotheses were made:

1. Croatian parents have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning. Such an assumption is based on the results of previous studies into parents' attitudes towards early foreign learning (Bartram, 2006; Brumen et. al, 2017; Dragarin Fojkar & Pižorn, 2014; Griva & Chouvarda, 2012; Knežević & Šenjug Golub, 2015; Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009).

2. Croatian parents consider English more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school.

3. There is no relationship between parents' age and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning.

4. There is a positive relationship between parents' level of education and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. Such an assumption is based on the findings of Knežević and Šenjug Golub (2015) suggesting that parents with higher level of education have more positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning.

5. There is a positive relationship between the number of foreign languages that parents know and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. This hypothesis is based on the findings of Dragarin Fojkar and Pižorn (2014) indicating that parents who know more foreign languages have more positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning than parents who know just one foreign language.

6. There is a positive relationship between parents' previous experience of foreign language learning in school and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning.

5.2. Participants

Participants in the study were 110 self-selected parents, that is parents who volunteered to take part. Initially there were 148 participants, but 38 of them were excluded from the study because of one or several of the following reasons: they did not live in Croatia, they had another mother tongue in addition to Croatian, none of their children attended a Croatian-medium elementary school and none of their children currently attended an elementary school. I applied these exclusion criteria in order to obtain a relatively homogeneous sample of participants, who

would be familiar with early foreign language learning in Croatia and not be predisposed towards having positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning. All the participants were thus monolingual native speakers of Croatian living in Croatia at the time of participation in the study, whose children attended a Croatian-medium elementary school at that time. The participants were recruited via advertisements on social networks and via snowball sampling.

A total of 96.3% (*n*=106) of the participants were female and 3.7% (*n*=4) were male. The participants were aged between 24 to 53 years. Information on the age and gender of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Gender	Age		
	Range	Mean	SD
Male (*n*=4)	26-49	39.00	9.557
Female (*n*=106)	24-53	38.63	5.639
Total (*n*=110)	24-53	38.65	2.491

Table 1. Information on participants' age and gender

When it comes to the level of education, the majority of the participants, or rather 43.6% (*n*=48), declared to have completed their graduate studies. This was followed by 30% (*n*=33) of parents who have finished a high school, 19.1% (*n*=21) of parents who have completed their undergraduate studies and 7.3% (*n*=8) of parents who have completed their doctoral studies. The participants were also asked to name the foreign languages they learned in school. Most of the participants, that is 39.1% (*n*=43) and 40.9% (*n*=45) learned one or two foreign languages in school respectively. The rest of the participants reported learning three or four languages, except one parent who said (s)he learned five languages. The participants reported that they informed

themselves about early foreign language learning mostly by talking to the teacher or other experts in school and, to a lesser extent, by reading professional literature, via media or by talking to their friends. Only 11.8% (*n*=13) of the participants reported that they did not inform themselves about early foreign language learning. The majority of the participants, that is 73.6% (*n*=81) lived in the Primorsko-goranska County. The rest of the participants lived in Zagreb, Dalmatia or Istria. As far as children are concerned, the participants had in total 148 children. Out of this, 89.9% (*n*=133) of children learned English as their first foreign language in school, 9.1% (*n*=10) learned German, 3.6% (*n*=4) learned Italian and one child learned French.

5.3. Materials

Parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning were examined through an anonymous online questionnaire (see Appendix), which is an adaptation of the fourth part of a questionnaire used in the ELLiE project (Enever, 2011). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, the participants were presented with 19 statements about early foreign language learning and asked to express their level of (dis)agreement with the statements on a five-point Likert scale. The levels on the scale were: 1 ("completely disagree"), 2 ("mostly disagree"), 3 ("not sure"), 4= ("mostly agree") and 5 ("completely agree").

This was followed by six statements stating that English is more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school, namely Physical Education, Nature and Society, Math, Arts, Music and Croatian. The participants' task was to express their level of (dis)agreement with the statements using the same Likert scale as above.

The last question of the first part of the questionnaire was "If you inform yourself about early foreign language learning, please state how you do it". The participants were provided with

six possible answers including “I do not inform myself about early foreign language learning” and they had to choose all the answers that applied to them. Next to the answer “Other” they could write the answer which was not on the list. Also, it was possible to choose more than one answer.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants were first asked to provide their socio-demographic data (gender, age, place of residence, level of education and mother tongue). Next, they had to name the languages they knew and the languages they learned in school. After that, they had to evaluate their overall experience of foreign language learning in school on a five-point Likert scale, the levels of which were: (1“completely negative”), 2 (“mostly negative”), 3 (“equally positive and negative”), 4 (“mostly positive”), 5 (“completely positive”). This was followed by questions about children’s mother tongue, the purpose of which was to identify and exclude the participants whose children were bilingual as their attitudes towards early foreign language learning would most probably be positive. The same applies to the question about the type of school children attended. When asked “Which type of class in the elementary school your child or your children attend?” parents could choose between “a Croatian-medium class”, “an Italian-medium class”, “another type of class”, “Does not attend primary school”. Also, for the purposes of this study, it was important that the participants had at least one child who attended or would attend elementary school in the school year 2018-2019. That is why the question “Which grade of primary school will your child or your children attend in the school year 2018/2019?” was included in the questionnaire. In the end, the participants had to select the language their child(ren) learn as the first foreign language in school, choosing between English and German, and if their child(ren) learned another foreign language(s) in school, they had to write which language(s) it/they is/are.

5.4. Results

In order to extract dimensions or factors that are present among 19 statements in the first part of the questionnaire, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out. Two factors were extracted, both of which showed high reliability: Factor 1 ("Advantages of early foreign language learning and general statements") (α=.889) and Factor 2 ("Disadvantages of early foreign language learning") (α=.890). Factor 1 included 14 statements which concern the advantages of early foreign language learning, the support children receive from parents and teachers during early foreign language learning, the importance of parents being informed about early foreign language learning and the influence of parents' attitudes towards foreign languages on children's attitudes towards foreign languages. Factor 2 includes five statements which relate to the disadvantages of early foreign language learning. Factors with the English translations of the relevant statements are shown in Table 2 together with the median values of the participants' ratings for each of the statements.

Statements about parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning			
Factor 1	N	Median	SD
The earlier that foreign language learning starts, the better.	110	5.00	.616
Early foreign language learning develops the child's motivation for foreign language learning.	110	5.00	.840
Early foreign language learning helps the child acquire his/her native language.	110	4.00	.783
It is important to be informed about early foreign language learning.	110	5.00	1.093
Early foreign language learning develops the child's positive attitude towards other cultures.	110	5.00	.815

Parent support is important for effective early foreign language learning.	110	5.00	1.078
Learning a foreign language from the first grade results in a better knowledge of the foreign language than learning the foreign language from the fourth grade of the elementary school.	110	5.00	.867
Early foreign language learning develops the child's positive attitudes towards the foreign language.	110	5.00	.840
Early foreign language learning facilitates the child's subsequent foreign language learning.	110	5.00	.783
Parents' attitudes towards a foreign language affect the child's attitudes towards the foreign language.	110	5.00	.619
Early foreign language learning is fun for the child.	110	5.00	.815
I inform myself about early foreign language learning.	110	5.00	.989
Teacher support is important for effective early foreign language learning.	110	5.00	.867
Early foreign language learning positively affects the child's cognitive abilities.	110	5.00	.906
Factor 2	N	Median	SD
Children in the first grade are not mature enough to learn a foreign language.	110	1.00	.619
Early foreign language learning overburdens the child in terms of school obligations.	110	1.00	.989
Early foreign language learning is difficult for the child.	110	1.00	.906
Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's learning of the native language.	110	1.00	1.093
Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's success in other school subjects	110	1.00	1.078

Table 2. Factors and distribution of the statements about the (dis)advantages of early foreign language learning

It can be seen from median values shown in Table 2 that the participants have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning. This can be also seen by Table 3, showing the proportion of selection of each possible answer for each of the statements.

Statements about parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning					
Factor 1	Completely disagree (%)	Mostly disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Mostly agree (%)	Completely agree (%)
The earlier that foreign language learning starts, the better.	0.9	0.9	0.9	18.2	79.1
Early foreign language learning develops the child's motivation for foreign language learning.	0.9	1.8	9.1	24.5	63.6
Early foreign language learning helps the child acquire his/her native language.	3.6	8.2	37.3	32.7	18.2
It is important to be informed about early foreign language learning.	4.5	0.9	4.5	28.2	61.8
Early foreign language learning develops the child's positive attitude towards other cultures.	0.9	0.9	9.1	23.6	65.5
Parent support is important for effective early foreign language learning.	1.8	7.3	3.6	18.2	69.1
Learning a foreign language from the first grade results in a better knowledge of the foreign language than learning the foreign language from the fourth grade of the elementary school.	2.7	1.8	4.5	16.4	74.5

Early foreign language learning develops the child's positive attitudes towards the foreign language.	1.8	1.8	6.4	31.8	58.2
Early foreign language learning facilitates the child's subsequent foreign language learning.	1.8	0.9	4.5	22.7	70
Parents' attitudes towards a foreign language affect the child's attitudes towards the foreign language.	0.9	0.9	0.9	19.1	78.2
Early foreign language learning is fun for the child.	0.9	1.8	10	30.9	56.4
I inform myself about early foreign language learning.	2.7	2.7	13.6	24.5	56.4
Teacher support is important for effective early foreign language learning.	2.7	1.8	3.6	14.5	77.3
Early foreign language learning positively affects the child's cognitive abilities.	2.7	1.8	6.4	20.9	68.2
Factor 2	Completely disagree (%)	Mostly disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Mostly agree (%)	Completely agree (%)
Children in the first grade are not mature enough to learn a foreign language.	64.5	17.3	11.8	1.8	4.5
Early foreign language learning overburdens the child in terms of school obligations.	52.7	22.7	12.7	9.1	3.7
Early foreign language learning is difficult for the child.	56.4	21.8	13.6	3.6	4.5
Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's learning of the native language.	61.8	16.4	13.6	4.5	3.6

Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's success in other school subjects	70.9	12.7	7.2	5.5	3.6

Table 3. Proportion of selection of each possible answer for each of the statements about the (dis)advantages of early foreign language learning

Starting with statements belonging to Factor 1, Table 3 shows that 79.1% (*n*=87) of the participants completely agreed with the statement "The earlier that foreign language learning starts, the better." A total of 74.5% (*n*=82) of the participants also completely agreed with the statement "Learning a foreign language from the first grade results in a better knowledge of the foreign language than learning the foreign language from the fourth grade of the elementary school". We can also see that for every statement of Factor 1, except for the statement "Early foreign language learning helps the child acquire his/her native language", the predominant answer was "completely agree". The most frequent answer for the latter statement was "not sure", chosen by 37.3% (*n*=41) of the participants. Regarding Factor 2, consisting of statements relating to the disadvantages of early foreign language learning, the majority of the participants completely disagreed with every statement. The participants showed the highest level of disagreement with the statement "Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's success in other school subjects", for which 70.1% (*n*=78) of them chose the answer "completely disagree". The lowest level of disagreement was observed for the statement "Early foreign language learning overburdens the child in terms of school obligations", for which 52.7% (*n*=58) of the participants answered "completely disagree".

The results relating to the six statements stating that English is more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school are shown in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4 shows the median values of the participants' ratings for each of the statements, while Table 5 shows the proportion of selection of each possible answer for each of the statements. The English translations of the original statements are used in the tables.

Statements	**Median**
Learning English is more important than Physical Education.	2.00
Learning English is more important than Nature and Society.	2.00
Learning English is more important than Math.	2.00
Learning English is more important than Arts.	2.00
Learning English is more important than Music.	2.00
Learning English is more important than Croatian.	2.00

Table 4. Median values of the participants' ratings for statements about the relationship between English and other school subjects

	Completely disagree (%)	Mostly disagree (%)	Not sure (%)	Mostly agree (%)	Completely agree (%)
Learning English is more important than Physical Education.	34.5	31.8	22.7	5.5	5.5
Learning English is more important than Nature and Society.	31.8	22.7	5.5	5.5	30.9
Learning English is more important than Math.	38.2	32.7	20.9	3.6	4.5
Learning English is more important	28.2	28.2	25.5	9.1	9.1

than Arts.					
Learning English is more important than Music.	26.4	28.2	21.8	15.5	8.2
Learning English is more important than Croatian.	46.4	32.7	16.4	0.9	3.6

Table 5. Proportion of selection of each possible answer for each of the statements about the relationship between English and other school subjects

The values in Table 4 and Table 5 show that the participants do not consider English more important than other school subjects. The majority of the participants completely disagreed with each statement. The highest level of disagreement was noted for the statements "Learning English is more important than Croatian" and "Learning English is more important than Math", with which 46.4% (*n*=51) and 34.5% (*n*=38) of the participants completely disagreed respectively. The lowest level of disagreement was noted for the statements "Learning English is more important than Music" and "Learning English is more important than Arts." More precisely, 26.4% (*n*=29) of the participants completely disagreed with the former statement and 28.2% (*n*=31) of the participants completely disagreed with the latter statement.

We now turn to the relationship between parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning and other parent-related variables, namely age, level of education, number of foreign languages known and previous experience of foreign language learning. These relationships were explored by means of Spearman's Rho correlational analysis. In order to perform the correlational analysis between parents' level of education and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning, parents' level of education was transformed into a continuous

variable of years of formal education. More precisely, the high-school level was transformed into 12 years of formal education, the undergraduate level into 15 years of formal education, the graduate level into 17 years of formal education and the doctoral level into 20 years of formal education. The mean value of the participants' years of formal education was 15.34.

Two socio-linguistic variables were analyzed in the study, namely the number of languages that parents know and their previous experience of foreign language learning in school. Regarding the number of foreign languages they know, the participants reported knowing between one and five foreign languages. The majority, that is 40% of them (*n*=44), reported knowing two foreign languages. A total of 26% (*n*=29) of the participants reported knowing one foreign language, while 20.9% (*n*=23) of the participants reported knowing three foreign languages. Only a small proportion of the participants reported knowing four or five foreign languages, namely 9.1% (*n*=10) and 3.6% (*n*=4) respectively. As for their previous experience of foreign language learning in school, the majority of the participants, that is 40.9% (*n*=45), rated their previous experience of foreign language learning in school as "mostly positive". The second most frequent choice was "completely positive", chosen by 25.5% (*n*=28) of the participants. This was followed by 21.8% (*n*=24) of the participants who chose "equally positive and negative" as their answer. A total of 10% (*n*=11) of the participants rated their previous experience of foreign language learning in school as "mostly negative" and the remaining 1.8% (*n*=2) as "completely negative".

The results of the correlational analysis of parents' age, level of education, number of foreign languages they know, previous experience of foreign language learning in school, and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning are shown in Table 6. The variables in question showed a weak correlation, either positive or negative, with some of the 19 statements

concerning parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning. The statements with which a weak correlation was discovered are shown in Table 6.

Statements about parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning				
	Age	Level of education	Number of foreign languages parents know	Previous experience of foreign language learning in school
Factor 1				
Early foreign language learning develops the child's motivation for foreign language learning.	.02	**-.23***	.01	.15
Early foreign language learning helps the child acquire his/her native language.	.13	-.09	**-.19***	.13
It is important to be informed about early foreign language learning.	**.20***	**.19***	.08	.00
Early foreign language learning develops the child's positive attitudes towards the foreign language.	**.21***	.05	-.01	-.03
Early foreign language learning is fun for the child.	.01	**-.21***	-.06	**.20***
I inform myself about early foreign language learning.	**.19***	.06	.02	.04
Factor 2				
Early foreign language learning is difficult for the child.	**-.23***	-.06	-.06	-.01
Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's learning of the native language.	-.06	-.00	.06	**-.20***

Table 6. Correlations between parent-related variables and statements about early foreign language learning

Considering first Factor 1, weak positive correlations were discovered between age and three statements. More precisely, it was found that with the increase of age, parents' agreement with the statements "It is important to be informed about early foreign language learning" (r_s= .20), "Early foreign language learning develops the child's positive attitudes towards the foreign language" (r_s= .21) and "I inform myself about early foreign language learning" (r_s= .19) increases (although very slightly). With the increase in the number of years of formal education, parents' level of agreement with the statements "Early foreign language learning develops the child's motivation for foreign language learning" (r_s= -.23) and "Early foreign language learning is fun for the child" (r_s= -.21) decreases (albeit slightly). In contrast, with the increase in the number of years of formal education, parents' agreement with the statement "It is important to be informed about early foreign language learning" slightly increased (r_s= .19).

The number of foreign languages parents know correlated negatively and very weakly with parents' level of agreement with the statement "Early foreign language learning helps the child acquire his/her native language", which means that parents agree less with this statement as the number of foreign languages they know increases. The previous experience of early foreign language learning in school is, positively (although weakly) correlated with the statement "Early foreign language learning is fun for the child" suggesting that as parents' previous experience of foreign language learning in school improves, they agree more with this statement.

As for Factor 2, only two statements showed a weak and negative correlation with two of the variables examined. More precisely, with the increase in age, parents' level of agreement with the statement "Early foreign language is difficult for the child" decreases. Similarly, as parents' previous experience of foreign language learning in school improves, their level of

agreement with the statement “Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child’s learning of the native language” decreases.

6. Discussion

The aims of this study were to examine the attitudes of parents in Croatia towards early foreign language learning and to determine whether there is a relationship between their age, level of education, the number of foreign languages they know and their previous experience of foreign language learning in school and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. The hypotheses were that parental attitudes would be positive (Hypothesis 1), that English is more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school (Hypothesis 2), that parental attitudes would not be related to parents' age (Hypothesis 3), that parental attitudes would be positively related to parents' level of education (Hypothesis 4), that parental attitudes would be positively related to the number of foreign languages parents know (Hypothesis 5) and that parental attitudes would be positively related to parents' previous experience of foreign language learning at school (Hypothesis 6).

Hypothesis 1 was confirmed in the study – parents were indeed found to have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning. The majority of them believed that it is better to start learning a foreign language in the first grade of elementary school than in the fourth grade of elementary school. They also believed that early foreign language learning develops the child's motivation for foreign language learning, that early foreign language learning develops in the child positive attitude towards other cultures, that early foreign language learning helps the child acquire his/her native language, that it develops the child's positive attitudes towards the foreign language, that early foreign language learning facilitates the child's subsequent foreign language learning, that early foreign language learning is fun for the child and that early foreign language learning positively affects the child's cognitive abilities. Furthermore, they expressed a belief that in order for early foreign language learning to be successful, parental and teacher

support is needed. Therefore, they recognized the importance of parents' and teachers' role in the process of early foreign language learning. Parents also expressed a belief that parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning influence children's attitudes towards early foreign language learning. Parents did not regard early foreign language learning an additional burden for their children, they disagreed with the statement that children in the first grade are not mature enough to learn a foreign language, that early foreign language learning is difficult for the child, that early foreign language learning overburdens the child in terms of school obligations, that early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's learning of the native language and that early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's success in other school subjects. This is consistent with the results of previous studies investigating the attitudes of parents towards early foreign language learning (e.g. Bartram, 2006; Brumen et. al, 2017; Dragarin Fojkar & Pižorn, 2014; Griva & Chouvarda, 2012; Knežević & Šenjug Golub, 2015; Medved Krajnović & Letica, 2009).

Hypothesis 2 was not confirmed in the study. Contrary to the expectations, parents were found not to consider English more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school despite their highly positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported in the study. A weak positive correlation was discovered between age and three of the statements of Factor 1 and one statement of Factor 2 suggesting that with an increase in age, parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning become slightly more positive. This is somewhat in contrast to Griva and Chouvarda (2012)'s finding that younger parents had more positive attitudes than older parents towards early foreign language learning.

Hypothesis 4 was not supported in the study. The results showed a weak negative correlation between parents' level of education and two of the Factor 1 statements, the only positive correlation being found between parents' level of education and the Factor 1 statement "It is important to be informed about early foreign language learning". This is not in line with the findings of Knežević and Šenjug-Golub (2015), who discovered a strong positive correlation between parents' level of education and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. I suspect this might be due to the relatively low number of participants in the present study.

Hypotheses 5 was not supported in the study either. The results showed only a weak (and negative) correlation between the number of foreign languages parents know and the Factor 1 statement "Early foreign language learning helps the child acquire his/her native language". This is in contrast with the finding of Dragarin Fojkar and Pižorn's study (2014) that there is a positive correlation between the number of foreign languages parents speak and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning.

Hypothesis 6 was weakly supported in the study. A weak positive correlation was obtained between parents' previous experience of foreign language learning in school and the statement "Early foreign language learning is fun for the child", while a weak negative correlation was discovered between this variable and the statement "Early foreign language learning negatively affects the child's learning of his/her native language". This suggests that that with an improvement in parents' previous experience of foreign language learning in school their attitudes towards early foreign language learning become slightly more positive. I suspect that the reason why this hypothesis was only weakly confirmed in the study might be due to the limited number of parents with a negative experience of foreign language learning in school. More specifically, only two out of 110 participants reported their previous experience of foreign

language learning in school being completely negative and only 11 evaluated it as mostly negative.

As it can be seen, two out of six hypotheses were confirmed by the data. The obtained results showed (as it was expected) that Croatian parents have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning. Despite this and contrary to the expectations, they also showed that parents do not consider English more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school. The present study, as opposed to previous studies dealing with the attitudes of parents towards early foreign language learning (Dragarin Fojkar & Pižorn, 2014; Knežević & Šenjug Golub, 2015), did not reveal a relationship between level of education and the number of foreign languages known by parents, and parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning. However, it did discover a weak positive relationship between parents' age and previous experience of foreign language learning in school, and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. The former finding is not in line with the findings of previous research (Griva & Chouvarda, 2012).

The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of research that relates to parental attitudes towards early foreign language learning and suggest there is a need to further investigate this issue. More studies, with more participants, are needed in order to reach stronger conclusions about the relationship between different parent-related variables explored in this study and parents' attitudes towards early foreign language learning.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the attitudes of parents in Croatia towards early foreign language learning and to find out whether parents' age and level of education, the number of foreign languages they known and their previous experience of foreign language learning in school is related to their attitudes.

The results showed that parents in Croatia have positive attitudes towards early foreign language learning even though they do not consider English more important than other school subjects in the lower grades of elementary school. Contrary to the prediction that the higher level of education will result in more positive attitudes, this relationship was not revealed. Also, the results did not reveal a positive relationship between the number of languages known by parents and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. What was revealed was a weak positive relationship between parents' age and previous experience of foreign language learning in school, and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning.

As correlations obtained in the present study were rather weak, they do not provide conclusive evidence on the relationship between parents' age, level of education, previous experience of foreign language learning in school and the number of foreign languages known, and their attitudes towards early foreign language learning. For this reason, more research on this issue is needed. Because of the relatively small number of participants in this study, future research should include more participants.

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Appendix

Upitnik za roditelje

Poštovani/a,

ljubazno Vas molimo da ispunite ovaj upitnik koji se odnosi na Vaše poglede vezane uz rano učenje stranoga jezika. Bilo bi nam od velike pomoći kada biste iskreno odgovorili na postavljena pitanja i pružili nam time što točniji uvid u Vaše stavove i uvjerenja. Upitnik se provodi za potrebe istraživanja koje se provodi na Filozofskome fakultetu Sveučilišta u Rijeci. Upitnik je u potpunosti anoniman, a podaci koji se od Vas prikupe koristit će se samo za potrebe ovoga istraživanja. Hvala Vam što ste odvojili vrijeme da nam pomognete!

Valentina Bago i izv. prof. dr. sc. Tihana Kraš

Prvi dio

Recite nam što mislite o ranome učenju stranoga jezika. **Pod ranim učenjem stranoga jezika podrazumijevamo učenje stranoga jezika kao obaveznoga predmeta u školi od prvoga razreda osnovne škole.**

Molimo Vas da označite kvadratić koji označava u kojoj se mjeri slažete s navedenim tvrdnjama.

	U potpunosti se slažem.	Uglavnom se slažem.	Nisam siguran/na.	Uglavnom se ne slažem.	U potpunosti se ne slažem.
Što ranije započne učenje stranoga jezika, to bolje.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika razvija djetetovu motivaciju za učenje stranih jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika pomaže djetetu u usvajanju materinskoga jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Djeca u prvome razredu nisu dovoljno	□	□	□	□	□

zrela za učenje stranoga jezika.					
Važno se informirati o ranome učenju stranoga jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika razvija kod djeteta pozitivan stav prema drugim kulturama.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika preopterećuje dijete u pogledu školskih obaveza.	□	□	□	□	□
Kako bi rano učenje stranoga jezika bilo učinkovito, važna je podrška roditelja.	□	□	□	□	□
Učenje stranoga jezika od prvoga razreda rezultira boljim znanjem stranoga jezika od učenja stranoga jezika od četvrtoga razreda osnovne škole.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika djetetu je teško.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika potiče pozitivne stavove djeteta prema stranome jeziku.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika olakšava djetetu kasnije učenje drugih stranih jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Stavovi roditelja o stranome jeziku utječu na stavove djeteta prema stranome jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika loše utječe na učenje materinskoga jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika djetetu je zabavno.	□	□	□	□	□
Informiram se o ranome učenju stranoga jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika loše utječe na savladavanje drugih školskih predmeta.	□	□	□	□	□

Kako bi rano učenje stranoga jezika bilo učinkovito, važna je podrška nastavnika stranoga jezika.	□	□	□	□	□
Rano učenje stranoga jezika pozitivno utječe na djetetove umne sposobnosti.	□	□	□	□	□

	U potpunosti se slažem.	Uglavnom se slažem.	Nisam siguran/na.	Uglavnom se ne slažem.	U potpunosti se ne slažem.
Učenje engleskog jezika važnije je od tjelesne i zdravstvene kulture.	□	□	□	□	□
Učenje engleskog jezika važnije je od prirode i društva.	□	□	□	□	□
Učenje engleskoga jezika važnije je od matematike.					
Učenje engleskoga jezika važnije je od likovnoga odgoja.					
Učenje engleskoga jezika važnije je od glazbenoga odgoja.					
Učenje engleskoga jezika važnije je od hrvatskoga jezika.					

Ako se informirate o ranome učenju stranoga jezika, molimo Vas da navedete na koji to način činite (moguće je odabrati više odgovora).

□ kod nastavnika stranoga jezika

□ kod drugih stručnjaka (npr. školski psiholog, ravnatelj, pedijatar, defektolog)

□ putem medija

□ čitanjem stručne literature

□ na drugi način (molimo navedite):

_____

□ Ne informiram se o ranome učenju stranih jezika.

Drugi dio

Molimo Vas da nam kažete nešto o sebi i svojoj obitelji kako bismo mogli ispitati koji čimbenici utječu na stavove roditelja o ranome učenju stranoga jezika. Molimo Vas da odaberete one dijelove koji su relevantni za Vas i Vašu obitelj.

Spol:

□ muški

□ ženski

Dob:

_____

Grad ili mjesto u kojem trenutno živite:

_____

Koji je najviši stupanj obrazovanja koji ste stekli?

□ osnovna škola

□ srednja škola

□ više obrazovanje (npr. završen preddiplomski studij)

□ visoko obrazovanje (npr. završen diplomski studij)

□ doktorski studij

□ ostalo, molimo navedite _____

Koji Vam je materinski jezik ili koji su Vam materinski jezici? Pod materinskim jezikom podrazumijevamo jezik koji ste usvajali od rođenja ili od rane dobi.

Koje strane jezike poznajete?

_____

Koje ste strane jezike učili u školi?

_____

Kako biste opisali svoje iskustvo učenja stranih jezika u školi? Molimo Vas da označite odgovarajući odgovor.

U potpunosti negativno	Uglavnom negativno	Podjednako negativno i pozitivno	Uglavnom pozitivno	U potpunosti pozitivno
□	□	□	□	□

Grad ili mjesto u kojem trenutno živi Vaše dijete ili žive Vaša djeca:

Prvorođeno dijete	Drugorođeno dijete	Trećerođeno dijete	Četvrtorođeno dijete

Koji je materinski jezik Vašeg djeteta ili Vaše djece? Upišite jezik ili jezike u odgovarajuće rubrike. U jednu rubriku možete unijeti više jezika.

Prvorođeno dijete	Drugorođeno dijete	Trećerođeno dijete	Četvrtorođeno dijete

Koji će razred osnovne škole Vaše dijete ili Vaša djeca pohađati u školskoj godini 2018./2019.? Molimo Vas da označite odgovarajući odgovor.

	Prvi razred	Drugi razred	Treći razred	Četvrti razred	Peti razred	Šesti razred	Sedmi razred	Osmi razred	Ne ide još u osnovnu školu.	Završilo je osnovnu školu.
Prvorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Drugorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Trećerođeno dijete	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
Četvrtorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

Koje vrste odjeljenja u osnovnoj školi pohađa Vaše dijete ili pohađaju Vaša djeca? Molimo Vas da označite odgovarajući odgovor.

	Odjeljenje u kojem se nastava održava na hrvatskome jeziku	Odjeljenje u kojem se nastava održava na talijanskome jeziku	Odjeljenje u kojem se nastava održava na nekome drugom jeziku (navedite kojem): _____	Ne pohađa osnovnu školu.
Prvorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□

Drugorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□
Trećerođeno dijete	□	□	□	□
Četvrtorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□

Koji strani jezik uči Vaše dijete ili uče Vaša djeca kao obavezni predmet u osnovnoj školi od prvoga razreda? Molimo Vas da označite odgovarajući odgovor.

	Engleski jezik	Njemački jezik	Neki drugi jezik (navedite koji): _____	Ne pohađa osnovnu školu.
Prvorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□
Drugorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□
Trećerođeno dijete	□	□	□	□
Četvrtorođeno dijete	□	□	□	□

Ako Vaše dijete uči ili Vaša djeca uče još neki strani jezik ili strane jezike u osnovnoj školi, navedite koji/e.

Prvorođeno dijete	Drugorođeno dijete	Trećerođeno dijete	Četvrtorođeno dijete

Ako imate dodatnih pitanja ili komentara o tematici koja se ispituje ovim upitnikom, molimo Vas da ih ovdje navedete.

Ako želite da Vas nakon provedbe istraživanja informiramo o njegovim rezultatima, molimo Vas da navedete svoju adresu e-pošte.

Srdačno Vam zahvaljujemo na suradnji i pomoći!