

# The Digital Era and Out-of-school Exposure to English: Young Learners Ten Years Ago and Today

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The Digital Era and Out-of-school Exposure to English:

Young Learners Ten Years Ago and Today

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Digitalno doba i izvanškolska izloženost engleskom jeziku: učenici prije deset godina i danas

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to explore differences in out-of-school exposure to English of young Croatian learners ten years ago and today. More precisely, the paper will compare the frequency of exposure of young learners to digital and other types of media ten years ago and today. It will also discuss the types of digital tools most commonly used among young learners, and how the use of these sources and tools has changed over the course of ten years. Moreover, the paper will also discuss the underlying concepts related to this issue, i.e. the differences between implicit and explicit learning, as well as the differences between formal and informal language learning. As the informal aspect of language learning will be a predominant focus in this paper, a special attention will be given to the role of out-of-school exposure in second language acquisition. The results of the study point to the fact that young learners are nowadays more exposed to the English language through digital media, i.e. the Internet which is nowadays mainly used for listening to music and watching films and/or series. However, it was also noticed that they are less exposed to print sources of the English language, and that their out-of-school exposure to English relies mostly on receptive skills, rather than productive skills.

Key words: digital era, out-of-school exposure to English, young learners of English, informal learning, implicit learning

## **1. Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has undeniably been marked by the rapid development of technology. It is not false to say that modern technology and digital media are nowadays omnipresent, and that they affect humans in various ways. In other words, we are living in a digital era or a digital age. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, digital age can be defined as “the present time, in which many things are done by computer and large amounts of information are available because of computer technology”, or as “the present time, when most information is in a digital form, especially when compared to the time when computers were not used” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). This era has also influenced the way in which foreign languages are learned, especially when it comes to the plethora of sources that are readily available on the Internet, and which offer a new type of exposure to a foreign language. It is also important to mention that this enables learners to be exposed to a language in an out-of-school environment, and that schools do not necessarily have to be the only instance where learners are exposed to a language. This master’s thesis will focus on these kinds of sources, and will not delve into the school-related exposure to a foreign language. Furthermore, this thesis is primarily focused on young Croatian learners and the influence the digital and other types of media have had on their early English language learning. The thesis will not focus solely on the Internet-provided sources, but it will also touch upon other types of sources, such as books, as the aim of this paper is the exploration of the overall out-of-school exposure to the English language. Therefore, the paper intends to encompass a variety of different out-of-school sources which affect the learning process. Another aim of the thesis is the exploration of how out-of-school exposure to English has changed throughout the years. In order to do that, this paper will examine two sets of data, one collected in the years 2007 and 2010, and the other in 2019 and 2020. By doing this, the thesis aims to see to which type of sources were children mostly exposed to over 10 years ago, and to which they have mostly been exposed to recently.

When it comes to the structure of this thesis, firstly it will deal with the theoretical framework which includes the examination of the differences between implicit and explicit learning, and between formal and informal exposure to a language. Secondly, it will examine characteristics of second language learners, and the role that out of-school-exposure to a language can have in learning. Lastly, the thesis will touch upon the Croatian national education, i.e. the foreign language education policies. Afterwards, the study and its findings will be

presented and analyzed, which will be followed by a conclusion and suggestions for further research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Implicit and explicit learning**

There have been many debates regarding implicit and explicit learning, notably when it comes to their definitions, both in cognitive psychology and in SLA theories (second language acquisition theories). One of the most important notions related to these types of learning are the notions of awareness, attention and consciousness, which is precisely where the debates regarding this issue stem from, as it may be fairly difficult to determine whether learners are actively aware of the learning process, or if they are not (Hulstijn, 2005, p. 134). In his work *Theoretical and Empirical Issues in the Study of Implicit and Explicit Second-language Learning*, Hulstijn (2005, p. 134) states that “in the field of SLA, it has now become customary to accept the noticing hypothesis of Schmidt (2001), which claims that at least some attention to and awareness of elements of the surface structure of utterances in the input is necessary for learning to take place.” Nevertheless, this thesis opts for the differentiation between the two, and will thus provide the theoretical explanations of both.

As Rod Ellis puts it, cognitive psychologists distinguish implicit and explicit learning in two principal ways. Firstly, implicit learning refers to the type of learning which occurs “without making demands on central attentional resources” which means that “the resulting knowledge is subsymbolic, reflecting statistical sensitivity to the structure of the learned material”, whereas “explicit learning typically involves memorizing a series of successive facts and thus makes heavy demands on working memory. As a result, it takes place consciously and results in knowledge that is symbolic in nature (i.e. it is represented in explicit form)” (Ellis, 2009, p. 3). Secondly, in implicit learning, “learners remain unaware of the learning that has taken place, although it is evident in the behavioral responses they make”, i.e. “learners cannot verbalize what they have learned” (Ellis, 2009, p. 3). However, when it comes to explicit learning, “learners are aware that they have learned something and can verbalize what they have learned” (Ellis, 2009, p. 3). Considering the provided definitions of implicit and explicit learning, one could argue that learning English in an out-of-school environment falls under the scope of implicit learning as learners are not primarily focused on learning of the language itself,



but rather on the content they are exposed to. For instance, when they watch TV or play games, their attention is most likely shifted towards the content of a program or the task of a game.

In this context, it is also useful to mention the difference between incidental and intentional learning, as well as the difference between inductive and deductive learning. Incidental learning refers to the “mode in which participants are not forewarned of an upcoming retention test for a particular type of information”, and it might as well be defined as “unintentional picking up of information” (Hulstijn, 2005, p. 132). On the other hand, intentional learning refers to “the learning mode in which participants are informed, prior to their engagement in a learning task, that they will be tested afterward on their retention of a particular type of information” (Hulstijn, 2005, p. 132).

Furthermore, when it comes to inductive and deductive learning, the former means that “learning takes place when examples are given before rules are presented”, whereas deductive learning takes place “when rules are presented before examples are provided” (Hulstijn, 2005, p. 132). Taking the provided definitions into consideration, it can be argued that out-of-school exposure to English may lead to incidental and inductive learning of the language because learners are not subjected to any type of testing, and they may learn elements of the language without having any prior instruction, and without being given any kind of rules or theoretical background.

## **2.2. Second language learners: characteristics, conditions, formal and informal learning**

Before delving into the differences between formal and informal exposure to a language, it is important to mention the manner in which young children learn a language, i.e. the fact that “a second language learner is different from a very young child acquiring a first language” as this is “true in terms of both the learner’s characteristics and the environment in which first and second language acquisition typically occur” (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 29). When it comes to second language learners’ characteristics, the only common trait they all have, regardless of the age, is the fact that they have already acquired one language, which can be both an advantage (since they are familiar with how languages function), and a disadvantage (due to interferences leading to errors) (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 30). Nonetheless, what sets young learners apart from adults or adolescents is the fact that they have not yet attained a full cognitive maturity or metalinguistic awareness as older second language learners have

(Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 30). Besides that, young second language learners may also display attitudinal and cultural differences because most children willingly use a new language despite limited proficiency, however, this may not always be the case as some prefer to participate less actively in a social interaction (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 31).

When it comes to learning conditions, there is an informal environment and a formal environment, the difference being that informal exposure happens outside classrooms, whereas formal exposure is usually connected with school-like environment where a language is learned in a systematic way. In informal second language-learning environment, learners are “usually allowed to be silent until they are ready to speak” and “they may also have opportunities to practice their second language ‘voice’ in songs and games that allow them to blend their voices with those of other children” (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, 32). Furthermore, in a formal setting, children are exposed to a language during a limited amount of time, while in informal settings, they “are usually exposed to the second language for many hours every day” (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 31). It may be argued that this is especially true for children living in a foreign country. Even though this thesis is not focused on this type of exposure, we may still find the proposed idea relevant as children nowadays are oftentimes exposed to the English language at their homes via different media. Another thing that is a characteristic of second language learning outside of classroom is the lack of error correction: “Similarly, in second language learning outside of classrooms, errors that do not interfere with meaning are usually overlooked. Most people would feel they were impolite if they interrupted and corrected someone who was trying to have a conversation with them” (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 31). In addition, second language learners are also often exposed to a modified or adapted input in case they are engaged in social interaction: “This adjusted speech style, called child-directed speech in first language acquisition, has sometimes been called foreigner talk or teacher talk in certain contexts of second language acquisition” (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 32). It is important to bear in mind that this type of adjusted input does not necessarily occur when children are exposed to digital media, however, children may be exposed to content which is more child friendly, and thus adapted to them linguistically as well.

Regarding other important differences in informal and formal exposure, Lightbown and Spada (2006) divide them into natural and structure-based settings. The former refers to a variety of characteristics such as the following: language is not presented step by step, learners’ errors are rarely corrected, the learner is surrounded by the language many hours each day, the learner usually encounters a number of different people who use the target language proficiently,

learners observe or participate in many different types of language events, learners must often use their limited second language ability to respond to questions or get information, and modified input is available in many one-to-one conversations (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 110-111). On the other hand, structure-based language acquisition encompasses the idea that linguistic items are presented and practiced in isolation, errors are frequently corrected, learning is often limited to a few hours a week, the teacher is often the only native or proficient speaker the student comes in contact with, students also experience a limited range of language discourse types (the most typical being the Initiation/Response/Evaluation), and finally, students often feel pressure to speak or write in the second language correctly, and teachers often use the learners' native language to give instructions or in classroom management events (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 112). Nonetheless, it is important to mention that these instances may vary, but it could be argued that the ones which have been mentioned represent the most frequent ones.

### **2.3. The role and types of out-of-school exposure to language**

As it was shown in the previous chapter, the process of language acquisition may vary significantly according to the type of exposure. As this thesis is not concerned with formal exposure to a language, i.e. with classroom and structure-based language acquisition, it was decided to dedicate a special chapter to informal exposure to language. That is, to the role of out-of-school exposure to language which is closely linked to the informal type of learning. As De Wilde, Brysbaert and Eyckmans (2019, p. 171) suggest, informal learning “happens as a by-product of other activities, so that time and place of learning are determined by these activities” which can as well be brought into relation with the exposure to the English language:

[...] today's omnipresence of the English language provides non-English speakers with many opportunities to pick up aspects of the language without any form of explicit teaching or assessment. English is used in many authentic contexts and integrated in many people's daily activities, such as listening to music, watching subtitled television programs, using the internet or social media, or gaming. These exposures do not come with a fixed curriculum, explicit grammar instruction, and formal assessment. People are simply exposed to English through activities where language learning is not the purpose.

Since the exposure to the above mentioned language sources is related to informal learning, it is also useful to define incidental language learning, i.e. contextual language learning. It refers to “the ‘picking up’ of words and structures simply by engaging in a variety of communicative activities [...] during which the learner’s attention is focused on the meaning rather than on the form of the language” (Hulstijn, 2003, p. 349). This concept, however, may as well be called contextual language learning because “incidental learning suggests that it occurs by chance, as a result of an unrelated activity, and is often taken to mean the opposite of deliberate (without intention)” (Elgort, Brysbaert, Stevens and Van Assche, 2018, as cited in De Wilde, Brysbaert and Eyckmans, 2019, p. 172).

When it comes to the type of exposure, this thesis deals with various out-of-school types of exposure, with a focus on digital media. More precisely, it deals with watching TV, video, computer and online games, listening to music, reading books and comics. Learning from the media can indeed vary from the traditional concept of learning because “each type of media is a symbol system in itself, as it has its specific features that interact with human cognition and learning” (Salomon, 1994, as cited in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019, p. 449). For instance, “TV as a medium can use symbol systems from the real world (gestures, modes of speech, clothing, iconography), or compose shots into specific sequences, thus representing temporality or causality without using language as a symbol system” (Salomon, 1994, as cited in Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019, p. 449). Nonetheless, one could argue that these symbol systems, together with language, “provide the learner with additional information, which improves the processing of the content. As the audio-visual language of TV is holistic, the concepts presented within it are highly context-dependent” (Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019, p. 449). The same logic might as well be applicable to other sources that this thesis examines, as many of them are audio-visual (video games, online games, YouTube, etc.). When it comes to the sources such as listening to music and reading, it is important to bear in mind that these are all activities performed by children in their free time, which arguably implies the fact that they enjoy them and adjust them to their own pace, i.e. they may be as effective as audio-visual inputs. As it was previously mentioned, all of them shift the learners’ attention to the content, rather than form. However, this does not exclude learning.

Although the usefulness of different types of media may vary among individuals, which can be due to their subjective interests, many studies have confirmed the hypothesis that informal language learning is quite relevant, especially in vocabulary learning. De Wilde, Brysbaert and Eyckmans (2019, p. 172) offer a few examples of these studies which are focused

on films, gaming and social media. Firstly, when it comes to films, “Two studies by d’Ydewalle and Van de Poel (1999) and Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) showed that children can learn vocabulary through watching a short, subtitled movie” (2019, p. 172).

This type of vocabulary learning through less-time-consuming exposure is quite relevant in gaming too, as Ryu (2013) states that “playing computer games can lead to language learning in different ways. Learners pick up words and phrases from the game through repeated exposure to this language during gaming,” moreover, “when playing massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs), learners unwittingly practice the language through interaction with native or more fluent peers as they often use (audio) chat functions with players who are on their team” (Ryu, 2013; Peterson 2010 as cited in De Wilde, Brysbaert and Eyckmans, 2019, p. 172).

Finally, besides video games, learners are nowadays exposed to social media as well. Social media may as well “provide similar conditions for language learning as they provide ample opportunities for interaction in the social network and users can all actively and creatively engage with the content” (Zourou, 2012, as cited in De Wilde, Brysbaert and Eyckmans, 2019, p. 172).

Furthermore, research showed that music alone can be a valuable input in vocabulary acquisition. In order to support this claim, Pavia, Webb and Faez cite several conducted studies which deal primarily with the influence of songs in vocabulary learning. Some of the proposed ideas include the fact that:

[...] they can provide large quantities of language input. Lindgren and Muñoz (2013), looked at different sources of out-of-school exposure to the foreign language (FL). Internet use, watching films with or without subtitles, playing video games, reading and speaking in the FL, and listening to music in the FL were among the sources of FL input. The target FL was English for most of the participants in this study, and the participants reported that listening to music was the most common type of L2 exposure outside the classroom (2019, p. 748).

What is more, songs may as well be “repetitive and conversation like (Murphey 1992, as cited in Pavia, Webb and Faez 2019, p. 748), which “along with the ‘song-stuck-in-my-head phenomenon’ or the ‘din in the head,’ which is uncontrollably rehearsing the song in one’s head (Murphey 1992), gives songs the potential to be an effective source of input for vocabulary learning” (Pavia, Webb and Faez, 2019, p. 748).

Another crucial factor that should be mentioned alongside the types of exposure to a language, and which affects the learners' progress, is the parental influence:

Parental influence has been widely recognized, including factors such as parents' literacy levels, parents' involvement and attitudes towards the FL and parents' proficiency in the FL. Educationalists identify the influence of the parents' literacy level as having a much greater impact than the family's socioeconomic background (Muñoz and Lindgren 2011, p. 106).

Likewise, research showed that "parents' proficiency in the FL has also appeared as a significant factor in research. For example, Chambers (1999) observed a tendency for pupils to feel more encouragement the higher the level they perceived their parents' FL (English) competence to be" (Muñoz and Lindgren, 2011, p. 106).

#### **2.4. Early language learning in Croatia**

In Croatia, learning a foreign language is obligatory by the national curriculum, i.e. Croatian young learners begin learning a foreign language from the first grade of primary school, and they may choose among different languages (English included). Furthermore, Croatian learners begin learning another foreign language in the fourth grade of primary school, however, this remains optional.

Learners are exposed to their first foreign language 70 hours per school year from the first to fourth grade, and 105 hours per school year from fifth to eighth grade. The second foreign language is taught for 70 hours per school year, from the fourth to eighth grade (Narodne novine, 14/1/2019). Despite that, "in Croatia, due to the presence of the English language through subtitled TV programmes, the internet, social media, music and gaming, English is an integral part of the everyday lives of many people", which means that "English language learning in Croatia is most commonly the result of formal learning in FL classrooms and informal/out-of-school exposure to English, primarily through the media" (Hendrih and Letica Krevelj, 2019, p. 448).

### **3. The study**

#### **3.1. Aim**

The aim of this study is to compare of out-of-school exposure to English in young learners ten years ago and today. The study is primarily focused on digital media, but it takes into consideration non-digital sources as well, such as books. The reason why it emphasizes the digital aspect of out-of-school exposure is the omnipresence of technology nowadays, and by comparing learners' habits ten years ago and today, it may be possible to determine which types of media learners prefer, and how often they use them. The obtained data could thus be an effective insight into how young learners' behavior changes, and how this can be incorporated into classrooms as well.

Study question 1: What types of out-of-school sources of English did learners mostly use ten years ago and to what extent?

Study question 2: What types of out-of-school sources of English do learners mostly use nowadays and to what extent?

Study question 3: Did learners' habits change and in what way?

#### **3.2. Sample**

A part of the data (years 2007 and 2010) used in this study stems from the ELLiE project – Early Language Learning in Europe (Enever, 2011) in which Croatia took part, and the data used refers solely to the Croatian cohort. The ELLiE is a study project which “undertook the ambitious task of investigating the effectiveness of the teaching of languages in primary schools in a range of European countries” (Enever, 2011, p.1). This project deals with many different aspects of language learning, from individual differences, the school context, the teacher's role, out-of-school factors, to language achievements in a longitudinal perspective.

The data from 2007 and 2010 were obtained by handing out a questionnaire to the young learners' parents, either personally or via e-mail. Although they are similar, they do differ from one another in the sense that some questions were added or rephrased in the 2010 questionnaire. There were 141 parents who participated in 2007, and 161 parents in 2010. When it comes to the years 2019 and 2020, the questionnaire used was the same in both cases, and the data were

provided by 25 parents. In other words, it is the same set of questions given to the same set of parents, the only difference being that some received the questionnaire in 2019, and some in 2020.

The learners' parents from all sets come from various parts of Croatia, and it is important to mention that the parents who participated in 2019 and 2020 were not the same as the ones who participated in 2007 and 2010, meaning that this analysis is based on 2 different sets of participants – 2007, 2010 and 2019, 2020. Furthermore, the learners whose habits are examined were primary school learners, attending the first, second or fourth grade.

### **3.3. Procedure**

Considering the fact that the number of participants in 2019/2020 is much lower than in 2007 and 2010, this study will be of descriptive character, i.e. the study opts for qualitative, rather than quantitative approach.

As it was mentioned, the questionnaires were in all 3 cases handed out to parents either personally or via e-mail, and they returned them once they had completed them. The focus of this diploma paper is on the young learners' habits, i.e. a type of data that could have been accurately obtained only through the parents' answers.

The questionnaires from 2007 and 2010 were compared to those from 2019 and 2020 in order to find similar and comparable questions. It is also important to mention that the questions were translated for this paper, i.e. they were originally written in Croatian.

The 2010 questionnaire was based on the 2007 questionnaire, however, they are not the same because some questions were added to the 2010 questionnaire. The 2019/2020 questionnaire was based on the 2010 one, with some slight modifications and some additional questions.

The relevant questions taken from the 2007 questionnaire are the following:

- 1) *How much has your child been exposed to English outside school?*
- 2) *In percentage, how much has your child been exposed to cartoons, children programs, and / or films, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*



- 3) *In percentage, how much has your child been exposed to other types of TV shows with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*
- 4) *In percentage, how much has your child been exposed to children books and/or children magazines, comics on a weekly basis, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*
- 5) *In percentage, how much has your child been exposed to computer games with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*
- 6) *Do you have the Internet at home?*
- 7) *Do you visit Internet pages in English?*

The relevant questions used from the 2010 questionnaire are the following:

- 1) *In an average week, how much time does your child spend on watching English/American films, cartoons and / or series on TV, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*
- 2) *In an average week, how much has your child been exposed to children books and/or children magazines, comics, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*
- 3) *In an average week, how much has your child been exposed to computer games with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*
- 4) *In an average week, how much has your child been exposed to computer games, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?*
- 5) *Does your child use the Internet?*
- 6) *If your child uses the Internet, what does she or he use it for?*

As indicated, the 2019/2020 questionnaire is based on the 2010 questionnaire meaning that the questions which were used in this study are the same. However, one question that was perceived as relevant for this study, but does not appear in the 2010 one, is the following:

- 1) *Does your child deliberately look for content in English?*

### 3.4. Results and discussion

The results of the questionnaires will be presented in form of tables, and written in percentages. The results contain only valid answers. Furthermore, the comparable questions from the questionnaires were structured in a different manner. In other words, the 2007 questionnaire relied on parents' perceived percentage of young learners' exposure to English, whereas the 2010 and 2019/2020 questionnaires relied on the perceived, average time exposure to English on a weekly basis. Although all answers were converted into percentages, the results were sorted according to the type of question that parents had received.

#### *How much has your child been exposed to English outside school?*

The following table indicates the parents' answers obtained in 2007. This type of general question was not posed in 2010 and 2019/2020, however, it was decided to take the data into consideration as it could be compared to the data from the upcoming questions.

*Table 1: Average out-of-school exposure to English (2007)*

<b>average exposure time</b>	<b>2007 (answers - percentage)</b>
almost never	21,7
less than 2 hours a day	22,3
2 – 4 hours a week	26,1
5 + hours a week	5,1
one or more hours a day	24,8

As can be seen from the *Table 1*, the parents' answers were almost equally distributed across the time spans. This indicates that there were young learners who were almost never exposed to English outside school, however, almost the same percentage of learners were exposed to English for more than an hour a day. Moreover, if one adds to this the percentage of children who were at least somewhat exposed to English (less than 2 hours a day), it can be concluded that most children were generally surrounded by English daily in 2007.

With the following questions, the paper delves into the more specific questions regarding the sources of out-of-school exposure to English.

***In percentage, how much has your child been exposed to cartoons, children programs, and / or films, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?***

This question is related to the *Table 2*, referring to the year 2007. The numbers on the left indicate the general range of percentage (0 – 100 %), whereas the numbers on the right indicate the percentage of parents' answers that fall under the specific range of percentage (for instance: 1, 5 % of parents said their children were never exposed to cartoons, children programs, etc.).

*Table 2: Exposure to cartoons, children programs, and / or films (2007)*

<b>% (percentage range)</b>	<b>2007 (answers - percentage)</b>
0	1,5
1	0,7
5	4,4
10	11,8
15	2,2
20	14,7
25	1,5
30	14,7
40	5,9
50	16,2
55	0,7
60	5,1
70	7,4
80	7,4
90	0,7
95	0,7
100	4,4

When it comes to young learners' exposure to cartoons, children programs, and films, one may see that, in 2007, they were most commonly exposed to this type of source, meaning that most answers fall under the scope of the first half of the *Table 2*. In other words, most

children were either rarely or moderately exposed to English via cartoons, children programs, and films.

***How much has your child been exposed to other types of TV shows with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?***

There was no similar question in 2010 and 2019/2020. Nonetheless, it is considered relevant for the analysis in order to see whether children were more exposed to the content which was not necessarily aimed at children.

*Table 3: Exposure to other types of TV shows (2007)*

<b>% (percentage range)</b>	<b>2007 (answers - percentage)</b>
0	37,9
1	1,5
10	16,7
15	1,5
20	10,6
25	1,5
30	12,1
40	4,5
50	7,6
70	4,5
100	1,5

What can be seen from the results in *Table 3* is that most young learners in 2007 were mostly exclusively exposed to children content, which is indicated by the fact that most parents stated that their children never watched other types of English language TV shows, i.e. most answers fall under the range between 0 and 50 percent. What is more, 37, 9 % of parents stated that their children never watched other types of TV shows in English. This also goes in line with the above mentioned idea that out-of-school exposure to English falls under implicit learning as young learners are more interested in the content of the source, rather than explicit learning opportunities which could be provided by other TV contents, for instance, more serious documentaries. In other words, it could be said that if the content of a TV show is not

understandable or adjusted to children's cognitive abilities, this content will not be a source of implicit language learning.

***In an average week, how much time does your child spend on watching English/American films, cartoons and / or series on TV, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?***

Since the corresponding question from 2007 (analyzed in *Table 2*) was differently constructed, the data from 2010 and 2019/2020 are presented in the *Table 4* where the utmost left column represents hours in a week, and the following two represent the parents' answers in 2010 and 2019/2020, respectively. The same scheme is used in the forthcoming tables as well.

*Table 4: Exposure to English/American films, cartoons and/or series on TV (2010, 2019/2020)*

<b>hours</b> (weekly basis)	<b>2010</b> (answers – percentage)	<b>2019/2020</b> (answers – percentage)
0 – 1 h	11,4	16,7
1 – 2 h	24,3	16,7
2 – 3 h	11,4	25,0
3 – 4 h	18,6	25,0
4 – 5 h	15,0	4,1
5 + h	19,3	12,5

As can be seen in *Table 4*, in 2010, most children were exposed to English / American films, cartoons and / or series on TV from 1 to 2 hours a week, with no proportional decrease or increase towards higher number of hours. However, there is a slight growth when it comes to 5 and more hours of exposure, which could, as a matter of fact, indicate the overall increase in out-of-school exposure to English via cartoons, children programs, and films as 19,3% of parents stated that their children were exposed to this type of content for more than 5 hours a week. The year 2019/2020 shows similar tendencies as 2010 when it comes to moderate exposure (in this case 2 to 4 hours), i.e. 50% of parents stated that their children were exposed to English via visual media from 2 to 4 hours a week. However, very high exposure slightly dropped (from 19, 3% in 2010 to 12, 5% in 2019/2020). The same can be seen in low exposure (1 – 2 hours). This seemingly unexpected result will be brought into relation with the questions related to the increase of the Internet use.

If the corresponding data from *Table 2* (2007) is compared to *Table 4* (2010, 2019/2020), it can be seen that most young learners were moderately exposed to cartoons, children programs and films in English in all three cases. In 2007, 16,4 % of parents stated that their children were exposed to this type of content for approximately 50% of their spare time, whereas in 2010 and 2019/2020, the most common answer was 2 to 4 hours, with a slight growing trend in exposure in 2010. The drop in high exposure in 2019/2020 could perhaps be attributed to the growing role of the Internet.

***How much has your child been exposed to children books and/or children magazines, comics on a weekly basis, i.e. with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?***

*Table 5: Exposure to children books and/or children magazines, comics on a weekly basis in 2007*

<b>%</b> <b>(percentage range)</b>	<b>2007</b> <b>(answers – percentage)</b>
0	44,4
5	6,9
10	25,0
20	12,5
25	1,4
30	4,2
50	4,2
100	1,4

*Table 6: Exposure to children books and/or children magazines, comics on a weekly basis in 2010 and 2019/2020*

<b>hours</b> <b>(weekly basis)</b>	<b>2010</b> <b>(answers – percentage)</b>	<b>2019/2020</b> <b>(answers – percentage)</b>
0 – 1 h	22,9	72,7
1 – 2 h	64,3	18,3
2 – 3 h	7,1	4,5
3 – 4 h	3,6	0

4 – 5 h	1,4	4,5
5+ h	0,7	0

*Table 5* indicates a low exposure to print media in 2007 as almost half of young learners were not exposed to it, while the other half is mostly rarely exposed to written sources of English. In 2010 (*Table 6*), a slight increase is visible as most young learners were exposed to magazines, books and comics for at least 1 to 2 hours a week. Nevertheless, the number of children who were often exposed to print media in English remained low. What is significant is the drop in 2019/2020 (*Table 6*) as most young learners were in touch with these sources either for up to 1 hour a week or never, and none of the parents stated that their child read for more than 5 hours a week. Furthermore, *Table 5* and *Table 6* (the column referring to 2010) indicate that young learners read little before, but they read even less now (*Table 6* referring to 2019/2020).

***How much has your child been exposed to computer games with respect to all possible forms of exposure to English outside classroom?***

*Table 7: Exposure to computer games (2007)*

% (percentage range)	2007 (answers - percentage)
0	13,5
1	1,0
3	1,0
5	3,8
10	12,5
15	1,9
20	14,4
25	1,9
30	10,6
40	4,8
50	12,5
60	1,9
70	1,0

80	4,8
90	3,8
95	1,0
100	9,6

*Table 8: Exposure to computer games (2010, 2019/2020)*

<b>hours (weekly basis)</b>	<b>2010 (answers - percentage)</b>	<b>2019/2020 (answers - percentage)</b>
0 – 1 h	35,0	39,1
1 – 2 h	22,6	21,7
2 – 3 h	15,7	17,4
3 – 4 h	13,6	0
4 – 5 h	3,6	13,1
5+ h	9,3	8,7

When it comes to computer games, one can see 4 peaks in 2007 (*Table 7*). The exposure is not dispersed proportionally, and there is no indication of a steady increase or decrease in the percentage. However, there are 4 percentage spans where most young learners were placed – from never playing computer games (0%), playing them rarely (20%), sometimes (50%), and very often (100%). The years 2010 and 2019/2020 (*Table 8*) are similar to 2007 (*Table 7*), as most young learners were exposed to English via computer games from 1 to 2 hours a week. Nevertheless, it can be observed that in 2010 and 2019/2020, the percentage of young learners playing games in English grew in the range of 4, 5 and more hours a day.

***Does your child deliberately look for content in English?***

*Table 9: Child looking deliberately for content in English (2019/2020)*

	<b>2019/2020 (answers – percentage)</b>
yes	54,2
no	45,8



The above question was introduced in the questionnaire in 2019/2020, so it cannot be compared to the previous years. However, it seems relevant for this paper as it shows that more than a half of young learners are nowadays willingly exposed to the English language (as can be seen in *Table 9*). This may as well ameliorate their overall competence in English, and thus make them more apt to being exposed to English which they can understand, and which makes the experience of exposure more enjoyable. As it has been mentioned in the theoretical part of this paper, learners are not in fact aware of the implicit learning, but their behavioral responses do point to the fact that some type of learning occurred, i.e. it could be assumed that young learners who successfully learn English through out-of-school exposure will show greater interest in such content.

***Do you have the Internet at home?***

*Table 10: Access to the Internet (2007)*

	<b>2007 (percentage)</b>
yes	49,4
no	50,6

Before moving onto the digital, i.e. the online sphere of out-of-school exposure, it is interesting to see that, in 2007 (*Table 10*), there were more people who did not have the Internet at home than those who did, which inevitably implies the fact that digital media could not have influenced the overall out-of-school exposure to English in young learners more than 10 years ago. However, the results in *Table 11* indicate that almost 70% of parents, who stated they had the Internet at home in 2007, visited Internet pages in English.

***Do you visit Internet pages in English?***

*Table 11: Parents visiting pages in English (2007)*

	<b>2007</b>
yes	69,1
no	30,9

### ***Does your child use the Internet?***

*Table 12: Children using the Internet (2010, 2019/2020)*

	<b>2010</b> <b>(answers - percentage)</b>	<b>2019/2020</b> <b>(answers - percentage)</b>
yes	72,9	95,9
no	27,1	4,1

Once the rapid growth of the Internet in the 2000s was taken into consideration, it seemed redundant to ask parents whether they used the Internet in 2010, let alone 2019 and 2020. What is more, a higher number of children used the Internet in 2010 (*Table 12*), than the parents from 2007 did (*Table 11*). Therefore, the attention was shifted towards young learners' use of the Internet. As it was aforementioned, a high percentage of young learners used the Internet in 2010, and this percentage skyrocketed in 2019/2020 (*Table 12*). What can also be implied from this is the fact that the overall use of the Internet became much higher in late 2010s, and thus became a valuable source of the English language.

### ***If your child uses the Internet, what does she or he use it for?***

*Table 13: Purposes of using the Internet (2010, 2019/2020)*

	<b>2010</b> <b>(answers - percentage)</b>	<b>2019/2020</b> <b>(answers - percentage)</b>
watching films and/or series in English	41,2	66,6
playing online games in English	89,2	62,5
listening to music in English (YouTube, etc.)	77,5	87,5
reading web pages in English	26,5	0
writing in English (e-mail, messenger, etc.)	25,5	8,3

*Table 13* indicates what young learners used the Internet for, i.e. what their main sources of the English language were. In 2010, most young learners played online games, which is followed by listening to music, and watching films and series. In 2019/2020, however, most young learners used the Internet for listening to music, watching films and series, and then playing online games. Another important indicator is the decrease in the use of productive skills

like writing, and also in receptive skill of reading, as not many young learners use web pages or messaging applications as a source of English. Furthermore, even though the data from *Table 4* seemingly indicated a decrease in exposure to television content, it can be seen from *Table 13* that it was the Internet, or perhaps modern streaming services, that took the place of traditional television. Last but not least, the fact that young learners ten years ago and nowadays use the Internet as an important source of enjoyable activities, like listening to music and watching films, once again goes in line with the idea that all of these sources represent an opportunity for unconscious and implicit learning of English. Young learners primarily seek entertainment, with the English language being the tool that bridges the gap between young learners and their sources of congenial activities.

If all the data are taken into consideration, specifically the ones from tables indicating the amount of exposure (such as *Table 1, 2, 4, 8* and *9*), it could be argued that the propositions regarding conditions of learning and informal learning itself, given in the theoretical part of this study, are relevant for the results as well. Speaking of exposure to a language in informal settings, it was indicated that learners are more exposed to a language in an informal setting, than then they are in a formal, school setting. This was confirmed by this study as well because young learners are more exposed to out-of-school sources of English on a weekly basis than they are exposed to English at school. Young learners are usually exposed to English at school from 2 to 3 hours a week, whereas this amount of time is greatly surpassed by out-of-school sources of English, which also indicates the importance of out-of-school exposure to English.

Moreover, the theoretical part of this study touched upon the type of language input which occurs in formal and informal settings. When it comes to informal settings, language input is not adjusted to learners, meaning that they are usually exposed to authentic language input. This is valid for this study as well since it was shown that cartoons, films, TV shows, and especially the Internet were predominant language inputs for young learners, i.e. they were, and still are more often exposed to unadjusted language input than they are to structure-based language input.

#### **4. Conclusion and suggestions for further research**

The aim of this diploma paper was to examine how trends in out-of-school exposure to English changed throughout the course of ten years among young Croatian learners. By comparing similar questionnaires from 2007, 2010 and 2019/2020, the paper aimed at answering 3 main study questions.

The first question was related to the types of out-of-school exposure to English that young learners mostly used around ten years ago, and to what extent they used them. It was shown that, in 2007, young learners were generally moderately exposed to the English language in an out-of-school setting. When they were exposed to English, they were mostly exposed to cartoons, children programs, and films, which was followed by playing computer games, and reading children magazines, books and comics. During this time, more than half of parents stated that they did not use the Internet, and therefore, children were not as exposed to it as they were in 2019/2020. When it comes to 2010, the out-of-school exposure to English mainly remained the same and relied on cartoons, children programs and films, as well as computer games, whereas the use of print media remains low. Despite that, noticeable changes came with the rapid expansion of home Internet, as children began using the Internet for playing online games in English and listening to music in English.

In recent times, i.e. in 2019/2020, the Internet began prevailing as almost all parents stated that their child used the Internet. Young learners still rely on cartoons, children programs and films, with the average exposure being slightly higher, whereas the average exposure to offline computer games became lower, which is most likely due to online games. What is significant is the decrease in exposure to print media, i.e. reading. It could be argued that many sources nowadays moved online, and young learners nowadays primarily use the Internet for listening to music, watching films and series, and playing games. In other terms, it is not that children are significantly more exposed to English, but it is about how they are exposed to it.

Regarding the final study question, which was focused on the changes in learners' habits throughout the years, it could be said that young learners are becoming slightly more exposed to the English language, especially on the Internet. However, this study also showed that differences in sources like cartoons, films, and offline games are not as significant.

In other words, what presumably happened is the moving of these "traditional" sources to the online world, so children nowadays tend to be exposed to English in a slightly different manner than they used to be. What is important is that, even though the content itself remained more or less similar, it is the source that brought changes. This is also happening at the expense

of print media, and skills like writing, since learners are primarily developing their receptive skills, with the exception of reading because the decrease in reading books, magazines and comics became significant over the years. This could, as a matter of fact, bring one to the conclusion that it is not the case that children are nowadays always and exclusively exposed to the Internet and digital media, but it is that they are less and less exposed to print media.

For future research, it may be useful to explore exact kinds of content that young learners are exposed to in the online environment in order to incorporate their interests in school context as well. Moreover, it may be useful to see how these preferences can be used in sparking their interest for more traditional sources of language input, such as books. Finally, should a longitudinal study be conductible, it could be useful to see how the literacy of young learners has changed throughout the years.

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## Summary

Ovaj diplomski rad nastoji usporediti izvanškolsko izlaganje hrvatskih učenika engleskom jeziku prije deset godina i danas. Rad proučava u kojoj mjeri su hrvatski učenici bili izloženi izvorima engleskog jezika poput televizije, filmova, serija, časopisa, knjiga i interneta. Osim izvora, ovaj rad nastoji utvrditi i koliko su vremenski hrvatski učenici izloženi pojedinim sadržajima u svrhu usporedbe trendova prije 10 godina i danas. Teorijski, ovaj diplomski rad obuhvaća i koncepte implicitnog i eksplicitnog učenja, kao i formalnog i neformalnog učenja. Budući da je tema rada usko vezana za neformalni aspekt učenja jezika, posebna pažnja pridaje se i ulozi izvanškolskog izlaganja stranom jeziku pri njegovu usvajanju. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na činjenicu da su djeca danas više izložena engleskom jeziku putem digitalnih medija, a da njihova izloženost tiskanim, odnosno tradicionalnim medijima (poput crtanih filmova i televizije) nije doživjela značajnije promijene. Usto, rezultati pokazuju i stagnaciju, odnosno trend pada čitanja, dok su digitalni zabavni sadržaji danas jedan od značajnijih izvora engleskog jezika kod osnovnoškolskih učenika. Nadalje, istraživanje ukazuje i na činjenicu da se izvanškolska izloženost engleskom jeziku u većoj mjeri temelji na receptivnim vještinama, nego na produktivnim.

Ključne riječi: digitalno doba, izvanškolsko izlaganje engleskom jeziku, osnovnoškolski učenici, neformalno učenje engleskog jezika, implicitno učenje