

# Motivation for learning English in transition from pre-primary to primary level: A longitudinal case study

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**Master's thesis / Diplomski rad**

**2023**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:131:942659>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2025-02-14**



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Motivation for learning English in transition from pre-primary to primary level: A  
longitudinal case study  
Master's Thesis

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Zagreb, 2023

Sveučilište u Zagrebu  
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Katedra za metodiku

Motivacija za učenje engleskog jezika u prijelazu s predškolske na osnovnoškolsku  
razinu: longitudinalna studija slučaja

Diplomski rad

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Zagreb, 2023.

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## Abstract

This master's thesis, based on a longitudinal case study, aims to explore the motivation of a lower-grade primary school student who had studied English prior to enrolling in primary school, as part of pre-primary education.

First, the paper explores the transition between pre-primary and primary school education, particularly regarding English language learning motivation and the difference in this motivation from the pre-primary level to learning English as a compulsory subject in primary school. Furthermore, it discusses factors that influence motivation, such as age, coherence, continuity in the transition, the role of parents, teachers, and peers, the difficulty of the tasks given to students, self-concept, and self-confidence. Also, the paper explores the factors that demotivate primary school students.

The results indicate that the participant, who started learning English at a pre-primary level and had acquired it to a certain level, faced some difficulties learning English in primary school. Demotivation, boredom, and the impact on self-confidence were the most prominent difficulties. On the other hand, the results suggest that the participant, with prior knowledge of the English language, shows great potential, which, if nurtured correctly, can lead to success in English language learning.

Keywords: transition between pre-primary and primary education, early language learning, motivation, primary school students

## 1. Introduction

Pre-primary education, especially in Croatia, offers various programs for the early learning of foreign languages, of which English is the most widespread. The common belief is that the sooner children start learning a second language, the better.

"Early English programs are based on the widely held assumption that there is an optimal period for learning an additional language and children learn languages with ease. The critical period hypothesis, claiming that language acquisition should start before a certain age to avoid developing an accent and other limitations in one's proficiency over time, is a recurring reason to start English programs early."

(Nikolov & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2019, p. 582)

In her book, *Foreign language learning at pre-primary level*, Rokita-Jaśkow states that parents enroll their children in early language learning programs because they believe that this will lead to their children learning more languages in the future, as well as that early language learning is an investment in the child's future knowledge and career (Rokita-Jaśkow, 2013, p. 117). During the period of transition from pre-primary to primary education, children are faced with various difficulties, and the role of both institutions included in the transition, teachers, and parents, is to make the transition as easy and painless as possible for children and to provide them with support on every step of the way. In this way, children's potential is nurtured and directed toward success.

This master's thesis will first provide an overview of teaching English in Croatian primary schools and out-of-school exposure to English. Next, it will touch upon the transition period from pre-primary to primary education and young learners' motivation when learning English. Afterward, the longitudinal case 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. English in Croatian primary schools

In primary schools in Croatia, English is taught from the first or the fourth grade, ensuring the development of communicative and intercultural competence. Communicative competence implies language knowledge and skills that can be used in everyday life (Bagarić & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2007, p. 100).

If students have English as a compulsory subject from the first grade of primary school, they have 70 hours of English per school year in the lower grades of primary school, i.e., from the first to the fourth grade. By the end of primary school, from the fifth to the eighth grade, students have 105 hours of English per school year. If English as a school subject is introduced in the fourth grade, students have 70 hours of English per school year until the end of their primary school education, i.e., from the fourth to the eighth grade.

The teaching of the English language is based on communication and communication activities. Metalanguage, adapted to the learners, their age, experience, and level, is used in class. When it comes to grammar, that is to say, the teaching of the structures of the language, it is repeated cyclically and gradually extended so that the students really learn the basics and then have the possibility of improving their knowledge. Grammar is presented to students in an integrated way, that is, during communication activities and explicitly, using metalinguistic explanations. Teachers are encouraged to teach students to find linguistic regularities on their own using examples drawn from the target language. As far as textbooks for early language learning are concerned, most of them contain the stimulus for developing vocabulary learning strategies in all their activities, which is expected as the focus of initial learning is vocabulary acquisition (Andraka & Jurković, p. 34). Activities found in most textbooks for early language learning, for example, are guessing words from context, analyzing pictures and gestures, especially in activities such as listening and pointing to a picture, expressing the meaning of a picture with movement, arranging pictures in



the correct order, counting, listening and repeating, practicing rhymes, songs, and games, drawing, coloring, and simple writing. All these activities aim to encourage students to express themselves freely in English (Andraka & Jurković, p. 35-40). Also, early language learning textbooks are often accompanied by audio and audio-visual materials, which help students in their learning process (Andraka & Jurković, p. 45).

In order to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and to expose students to the English language, lessons are generally held in English. Students are encouraged to communicate and try out learned language structures in spontaneous utterances (Narodne novine, 14/1/2019).

Children in Croatia are exposed to the English language in schools and outside of school, primarily through the media. (Hendrih & Letica Krevelj, 2019, p. 448). In this context, the media has the biggest effect on children's vocabulary acquisition. Children exposed to a foreign language in an informal manner may be motivated to acquire the skills needed to understand the content they follow (Hendrih & Letica Krevelj, 2019, p. 450).

## 2.2. Transition from pre-primary to primary education

An important term that needs to be explained in terms of the transition period is young learners.

"Although early foreign language (FL) learning has by now established itself as a subfield of SLA as well as language teaching, the concept of the YL is still loosely defined. In most cases it comprises learners up to the end of primary education, which in many contexts ends around age 15. FL learners at the pre-school age are referred to as 'very young learners'." (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov, 2019, p.515)

Nowadays, pre-primary education offers a wide array of learning programs that young learners participate in, including second language learning. In addition, research suggests that pre-primary education positively affects "children's attention, class participation and discipline" (Mihaljević Djigunović & Letica Krevelj, 2021, p. 614).

The transition from pre-primary to primary education can pose certain challenges to children's social and academic development. Letica Krevelj and Mihaljević Djigunović (2021) state that the most important conditions to be met in order to provide effective early teaching of foreign languages and, therefore, an effective transition, are continuity and coherence. The idea of continuity entails a promise that young learners can continue learning the foreign language they began during pre-primary education. Coherence refers to the idea that children perceive the material they are exposed to as being logically, organically integrated, and consistent. In their study, Mihaljević Djigunović and Letica Krevelj (2019) mention a sense of progress as a major motivator for young learners in transition, while a discrepancy between their proficiency and foreign language input in primary school is a demotivator.

There are many differences between pre-primary and primary education, especially when it comes to foreign language learning. Pre-primary and primary English classes are also similar to some extent. They aim to familiarize the children with a foreign language and its culture, learning is implicit (with exceptions in higher grades of primary schools), and the goal is to motivate learners to further learning, to develop an interest in the foreign language. On the other hand, primary education is much more formal than pre-primary education.

Children who started learning English as a part of their pre-primary education are in the same class at school as those who have never learned a foreign language. In such a mixed environment, teachers cannot neglect true beginners, that is, they cannot devote themselves to all students and everyone's knowledge of the language in the same way. According to Pfenninger and Singleton (2017), this sometimes leads to demotivation, boredom, the stagnation of students who have learned a foreign language before, as well as pressure and inferiority complex on the part of students who are just starting to learn the language.

Lack of continuity can pose problems, especially when students' linguistic achievements are neglected instead of being accepted positively and upgraded (Burstall, 1974 in Rixon, 2019, p. 500). For this reason, it is important to recognize each student's

needs and motivate them to progress further. Children who are true beginners in primary schools and have received no pre-primary education can still make good progress because every age has its challenges and benefits for language learning (Johnstone, 2019, p. 25).

The transition process is viewed as complete when children completely adapt to the new educational environment. Therefore, it is important for the institutions, i.e., pre-primary and primary schools, to work together and support children and parents during this process. Parents play a key role in this aspect. In pre-primary education, their involvement needs to be high. Also, their own learning experience affects their children and forms their attitudes toward other languages and cultures. Therefore, their main task is to support their children. Another important thing is the parents' socioeconomic and sociocultural background. Even today, when pre-primary ESL is almost ubiquitous, not everyone can afford to learn English at a pre-primary level. To further explain, some children attend foreign language schools or have private English lessons from an early age, while some children learn English only in institutions where it is mandatory.

### 2.3. Young learners' motivation for learning English

Gifted children sometimes need special help at school. Such children need quality teaching, support, and an example to follow. Karijašević (2011) mentions that gifted children often drop out of school and that boredom is one of the main reasons for this. The cyclical repetition of everything they already know, or at least what they learn and understand very quickly, soon becomes boring. We can broadly associate this situation with children who started learning a foreign language at a very young age. If they start learning English in a pre-primary environment, by the time they start primary school, they are already familiar with the English language, and some children even have a fairly good command of the English language. Unfortunately, what often happens to such children is the same thing researchers have found to be the biggest problem for gifted children in school - boredom. For this reason, learners' motivation is extremely important.

Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation stemming from one's pleasure and joy in doing a specific activity, while extrinsic motivation refers to extrinsic factors, i.e., some kind of an extrinsic reward for doing an activity, such as a good grade. (Li, Han, & Gao, 2019, p. 61) In language learning, intrinsic motivation proves to be more beneficial, especially to young learners, as it decreases with age.

Research on young learners' motivation is vague because children tend to be less self-conscious and have a less defined self-system than adults (Li, Han, and Gao, 2019, p. 62). Furthermore, young learners' motivation is difficult to research because it is changeable, dynamic, and complex as opposed to the motivation of older children (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov, 2019, p. 516).

Everyone's motivation can change. It is not a stable concept. Children's motivation is especially variable, even on a short time scale. This means that their motivation can oscillate over a few months, weeks, or even during a 45-minute lesson at school (Waninge, Dörnyei, & de Bot, 2014, p. 718). Many factors affect young learners' motivation. Motivated learning behavior, a key indicator of motivation, can be defined in different ways. It is viewed as a combination of desire, effort, and attitudes or as effort and the deliberate decision to learn the language. Linguistic self-confidence, integrative motivation, and frequency of intercultural contact can all predict young learners' motivated learning behavior (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov, 2019, p. 523). Firstly, we will look into the learning experience, as it is an important factor that affects YL's motivation. Csizér and Kálman (2019), while discussing the L2 learning experience, define it as the perception of stimuli and circumstances that the student encounters and experiences while learning a foreign language in the classroom and outside the classroom. The learning experience can also be seen as a reflection on the entire process and learning period after the language has already been learned.

L2 learning experiences play a significant role in students' achievements but also in students' motivation, which is why learning experience should be a part of motivation research.

Another important factor is interethnic contact. Csizér and Kálman explain that "SLA and L2 motivation might be shaped by the quality and quantity of interethnic

contact." (Csizér & Káláman, 2019, p. 229) We can divide these contacts into direct ones, for example, encounters with a speaker of a certain language, and indirect ones, which assume being exposed to a certain language without actually interacting with a speaker of that language.

Another aspect of motivation includes feelings. Until more than a decade ago, the only emotion studied in terms of language learning was anxiety. Later, it was found that positive emotions experienced during language learning greatly influenced the students' motivation. Also, if learners feel challenged, their interest increases (Csizér & Káláman, 2019, p. 231).

One of the most important factors in learners' motivation is teachers. Teachers, like parents, have a significant impact on students' motivation. "Teachers' personality, commitment, competence and teaching method were found to have influenced students' motivation to learn languages." (Li, Han, & Gao, 2019, p. 65) The role of the teacher is principal in pre-primary and primary education because if young learners like the teacher, they tend to like the school subject and vice versa. Another thing worth mentioning is the motivation of the teachers themselves. Motivated teachers were shown to motivate their learners as well.

A different group of people impacting young learners' motivation are their peers, as young learners observe and assess their peers' motivation (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov, 2019, p. 522). From the age of 12, peers were shown to be even more important than teachers in motivating the learner (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov, 2019, p. 585).

Next, we must mention classroom situations and out-of-school situations. Classroom situations can greatly impact young learners' motivation – they can be really motivating, but early negative experiences may also cause a decline in their motivation. (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov, 2019, p. 516) Events that happen before the class itself can impact the learners, too. If they have, for example, experienced something unfavorable before school, their motivation will, almost as a rule, be very low. For this reason, teachers should start their lessons with warm-up activities (Waninge, Dörnyei, & de Bot, 2014, p. 718).

Another factor that impacts learners' motivation is the tasks they do in English classes. If a child is a high performer, then the tasks should be relevant and challenging in order to motivate the child. On the other hand, if a certain task is boring or too difficult for a child, it might demotivate them (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov, 2019, p. 518).

Lastly, individual differences, such as gender, age, intelligence, ability, interest, prior knowledge, learning style, and self-concept, greatly impact a learner's motivation. Furthermore, learners with a positive self-concept are prouder of themselves while learning a foreign language and, therefore, more motivated.

As opposed to motivation, demotivation can be caused by difficulties in learning the target language, dislike of the target language, teachers who do not inspire young learners or are not motivated themselves, unfavorable learning conditions, the constant recycling of the same topics, experiences of failure, to mention a few causes (Kikuchi, 2015, p. 10).

### 3. The study

#### 3.1. Aim

The aim of this longitudinal case study was to examine the experience of an individual learner who had started learning English at a very young age. The study was focused on her motivation and, more precisely, the difference between the level of her motivation at the pre-primary level, and when she learned English at primary school as a compulsory subject.

#### 3.2. Participant

The participant was a successful young learner of English as a second language. Eva, as she was named for the purposes of this study, was the oldest child of three, living with her family in a big city in Croatia. Her parents were Croatian, and their

native language, as well as Eva's, was Croatian. Both of her parents were passive users of English, and her father was an active user of German. At the beginning of the study, Eva was seven years old, and she was in the first grade of primary school. At the time of the last interview, she was ten and attending the fourth grade of primary school.

### 3.2.1. Language learning background

Eva started learning English at a private language school when she was five years old. She attended English classes at this school until she was eight years old. She started with 45 minutes a week, and she finished with 60 minutes per week just before she started primary school. The lessons at the private school were held solely in English and consisted of watching cartoons, dancing to, and singing songs, playing games, interacting in English among the students themselves, and filling out various exercises in the exercise book. Eva was surrounded by other children who had started learning English at a very young age, just as she had. Although she stopped attending English classes at the private language school soon after starting second grade, she immediately began taking private lessons at her home. The lessons were held approximately twice a week, with a duration of 60 minutes.

Regarding her private lessons, they were held completely in English, and Croatian was seldom used, not even for the purpose of clarifying certain unknown words. This was also done in English, and this was the method that Eva preferred. Eva mostly played games with her tutor in these lessons, read novels and short stories, filled out vocabulary and grammar handouts with various tasks, and talked about her school, friends, family, toys, events that had happened to her, and her everyday life. Eva spoke English from the moment her tutor entered the house and did not stop until she left. After her English lessons, she often played with her sister, again using English. Eva was really interested in English, and she liked using it daily.

With her family, Eva went on a couple of trips to London to visit some family friends. She had access to television and a tablet, and, from time to time, she watched animated movies and played video games in English.

### 3.2.2. Proficiency in English

Her proficiency was much higher than one would expect of a child her age and was definitely very different compared to her peers, who had started learning English in primary school. She spoke English fluently, wrote in English with minimal errors, and read books in English, already in the first grade of primary school. Eva had no problems using English for different purposes and found her way when talking about a wide array of topics. She even made some mistakes that are characteristic of native English-speaking children during the process of L1 acquisition. She was a bit shy when speaking Croatian, but she felt completely free when communicating in English. She showed some problems when it came to reading and writing in Croatian. She had to spell some words multiple times before successfully reading them, had problems splitting words into syllables, and often mixed up letters while writing. On the contrary, there were no such problems regarding English reading and literacy. She could read and understand novels easily and had already read two with her tutor before the last interview for this study. She began with a simpler one, "The 13-storey Treehouse," and moved on to the first volume of the Harry Potter saga without many difficulties. She only requested an explanation and translation of certain words that were specific to the magical world of the book, and some of the meanings she even concluded from context. She had no foreign accent. Her vocabulary level was also very high, and she used vocabulary from many different spheres of life. She used complex sentences and grammatical structures, and she even anticipated certain structures and made conclusions about the use of certain structures from using different ones or hearing them from her tutor.

### 3.3. Instruments and procedure

Before the beginning of the study, Eva's parents were asked to give their consent and to fill out a questionnaire concerning Eva's personality, her learning background, her habits regarding English (the amount of time she spent watching TV, listening to



music, reading, and playing games in English), her interest in and attitudes toward English. The parents were also asked to provide information about their own attitudes toward early English learning, which were very positive. Eva gave her consent as well, before every interview with her. She was aware of the audio recording.

The participant data was gathered through two primary interviews with Eva, one when she was in the first grade of primary school and the other almost three years later, in the fourth grade. Letica Krevelj and Mihaljević Djigunović (2021) conducted research on the individual differences of young learners who had learned English in preschool in their research on the transition from pre-primary to primary in learning English as a foreign language. Eva's first interview was conducted as part of that research.

The interview questions were general, pertaining to the experience of learning English, attitudes toward learning English, English classes in pre-primary and primary school, as well as outside of school, and were designed to elicit Eva's thoughts, attitudes, and motivation for learning English as a language and a school subject. Additional data regarding Eva's experience with English at school, thoughts about the English language itself and her progress, feelings and learning experience in school and outside of school, and thoughts and experiences with her school English teacher were gathered during her private English lessons with her tutor, through observation and discussions. These were gathered during Eva's fourth grade of primary school.

#### 3.4. Results and discussion

The first interview with Eva was conducted in Croatian and concerned her experience with English in pre-primary and primary school. Eva was a little shy, and the researcher had to ask her many sub-questions and encourage her to answer. After a few questions, she relaxed and continued the conversation with the researcher. During this interview, Eva expressed positive feelings about learning English, both in pre-primary school and as a compulsory primary school subject. When asked to describe her feelings when she understood some foreigners speaking English, Eva claimed she

had been happy to understand what they had been saying. Both Eva, during the interview, and her mother stated that she was proud that she could speak a little English with foreigners, which she did during her family's travels to London. Also, she said she enjoyed watching cartoons in English, playing games in school, and singing English songs they had learned in school, speaking English with her friends and her sister. Even then, she showed that her level of English was high, even above average compared to other children. She was aware that her English was good and that it had improved since starting primary school. When asked about the English classes in her school, she showed a lot of interest and was pleased with them. English classes in her primary school had a somewhat different concept from those in the private language school. Learning was much more formal, and Eva admitted she enjoyed a little change. Also, she knew English better than her classmates, which made her proud. However, her mother reported in her questionnaire that Eva was bored during her school English classes.

*Researcher: Who was the best pupil last year (in the private language school)?*

*And how do you know this?*

*Eva: I was the best because I could speak English the best.*

*Researcher: And who is the best pupil in your English class in school?*

*Eva: I am. (happily)*

*Researcher: And how do you know that you are the best?*

*Eva: Because I speak English better than everyone and I always know everything.*

Eva started having private English lessons at home in the second semester of her second grade of primary school. When Eva was in the third grade, her tutor observed some changes in Eva's attitude toward English as a school subject and decided to observe these changes more thoroughly when Eva started the fourth grade. According to her tutor's observations, when Eva talked about her English classes in school, she was not as satisfied with them as she was during the first interview when she attended the first grade of primary school. Her motivation for school English classes deteriorated

significantly as her knowledge of the English language grew and her competences improved, i.e., during her third and especially fourth grade of primary school. There were a few reasons behind this, which were attained through the researcher's observations during the interviews with Eva.

The first reason was boredom. During the second interview with the researcher and Eva's discussions with her tutor, she stated that she already knew all the things they were learning in school, including words, grammatical structures, and even the songs that were often incorporated in primary level English L2 learning. The content of the classes was very familiar to Eva, and she felt no need to be active, participate, or be motivated by a desire to learn new things.

*Researcher: Can you describe your English classes at school?*

*Eva: Sure. Yeah, it is really boring because we learn stuff that I already know. We are now learning how to count to 20. No, to a 100, actually. And some girls don't even know how to count to 10.*

*Researcher: You have some classmates that don't know how to count to 10?*

*Eva: Yes.*

*Researcher: What do you think about that?*

*Eva: That that's not good.*

Eva mentioned, during the first interview, that when she started primary school, she liked the more formal way of learning and classes in general. However, in the second interview, Eva claimed that the English language classes at school were always the same. They would read or listen to a story, copy words from the blackboard, and do exercises with the teacher. Eva stated she knew all the words from before, and all the exercises were easy and unstimulating for her. She was not feeling challenged. Also, she had a big problem with her English teacher. As her teacher was well aware of her level of proficiency in English, she felt no need to include her in the classes, and she gave more, if not all, of her attention to the children that had some difficulties and needed her attention and further help. This problem was prominent for Eva. During the

second interview, she often deviated from other subjects just to return to this one. During her private lessons at home, she often spoke about her dissatisfaction with her teacher. When asked about the school English teacher, Eva claimed she did not like her teacher because she was not as interesting as her pre-primary English teacher or as her private tutor. She did not like the fact that the teacher often used Croatian in class, and she did not like the part of the English class in school when the students needed to copy words from the board while the teacher sat quietly.

*Researcher: Is there something in your English classes that you like?*

*Eva: Actually, yes.*

*Researcher: What?*

*Eva: It's when we read because I love reading in English. And something that I don't like about the teacher is that she is a little bit... well she never... when I raise my hand, she looks at me, and she doesn't even... She doesn't want me to speak.*

*Researcher: Why do you think this happens?*

*Eva: I don't know. It just makes me sad.*

*Researcher: Why sad?*

*Eva: And angry.*

*Researcher: OK, why?*

*Eva: Because that is just like so mean.*

*Researcher: Do you think she may not want you to speak because she knows you know all the answers?*

*Eva: Yes. But I still think that's not fair. Because everybody gets a chance. And she gives everybody a chance, but not me. I really don't like this.*

As Eva did not need to make almost any kind of effort in school, she lost interest in doing her schoolwork and homework. She did her homework in class because she had extra time. This meant that outside of school, she did nothing for this school subject. She also did not study for tests because she claimed she knew everything and that there

was no need for her to revisit the school lessons. In her four years of primary school, she never studied for an English test. All her grades in English were excellent.

*Researcher: How do you feel when you do your homework in English?*

*Eva: It's boring because I already know all of that and I finish my homework in 10 minutes or something like that, and in class.*

*Researcher: And how do you feel when you study for English tests?*

*Eva: I don't study.*

*Researcher: You don't study for English tests?*

*Eva: No.*

*Researcher: Why don't you study?*

*Eva: Because I already know all of the stuff, and it's just from numbers to colors and then from school supplies and rhyming and... that's stupid.*

Eva's self-confidence began to suffer as a result of all of the factors that demotivated her. Through her observations, the tutor noticed that, over time, she became more and more withdrawn and shy when talking about English at school. In addition, she was aware that her and another student's grades were not the same.

*Researcher: How do you feel when you get an A in English? Or an A+?*

*Eva: I get A+, and I'm happy, but...*

*Researcher: But?*

*Eva: But actually, I don't know because, on every single test, I got an A+. And it's not the same A+ as Ana's. Or Bruno's.*

*Researcher: What do you mean?*

*Eva: These As are not the same.*

*Researcher: Why? How do you feel then?*

*Eva: I feel stupid.*

As we have mentioned before, Eva's parents were both passive users of English,

and her father was an active user of the German language. The first time she visited London was when she was just six months old, and she later visited it approximately five times.

Eva's mother told us that Eva usually spent around 3 hours a week watching English content on TV, 1 hour weekly on video games, 4 hours weekly on YouTube, and about 4 hours a week listening to music in English. She mentioned a few times that using English in communication came naturally to Eva and that she looked for additional content in English by herself.

Eva never talked to her parents about her English lessons in school. Her mother told the researcher that she used to do it when she started primary school, in the first grade, but she soon stopped. On rare occasions when her parents asked her about her school English lessons, Eva simply stated that they were boring and that they did not do anything special. Eva overheard a conversation between the researcher and her mother about her taking pride in what she did in school in English. She stated the following:

*"Why should I be happy and satisfied if I already know everything? How exactly am I progressing?"*

On the contrary, Eva was very motivated during her private English lessons at home. Every time she had a lesson, she felt the need to share all her weekly events with her tutor, talk about situations that happened at school, ask for advice, and show her all her new toys and games. She welcomed every single handout she got and gave it her best effort to complete all the tasks on a certain handout. She listened to her tutor with interest and enjoyed all the games they played. She frequently asked her tutor for explanations of certain words and expected to get them in English. Communication in English came naturally to her.

*Researcher: So, you do speak English outside of school, of course. When do you speak English?*

*Eva: When I'm getting ready, I'm pretending that I'm filming a video.*

*Researcher: So, you speak English when you're getting ready for school?*

*Eva: Yes.*

*Researcher: When else?*

*Eva: When I'm playing and when I'm texting my best friend because she knows English, too.*

*Researcher: And when else do you speak English?*

*Eva: Let's see... In my mind.*

*Researcher: In your mind?*

*Eva: Yes. Oh, and when I play with my sister.*

*Researcher: And? When we have our English lessons?*

*Eva: Oh yes, I didn't even realize that.*

Eva often talked to her parents about her private English lessons, where she herself noticed her improvement. She often ran to her mother during these lessons to read or show her something that she had done or written herself because she enjoyed her parents' support and pride in her progress. Another thing that she discussed with her parents was a project she actively participated in in school. This project gathered children from all over the world on the Zoom platform, and they talked about different subjects. As we have mentioned before, interethnic contact is a great motivator for young learners, and it surely motivated Eva.

To summarize, Eva's motivation shifted from the first to the second interview. Eva was motivated in pre-primary school and pleased with her progress in English. Her classes were enjoyable; she started at the same level as her classmates, spoke only English, and the activities simulated her. When she started primary school, she was proud that she knew English well and could demonstrate it in a new setting. Throughout the research period, Eva reported being better at English than her peers, both in pre-primary and primary. However, her motivation began to shift because of various factors. One of her least favorite aspects of school English classes was the reiteration of content, which she thought was boring, and she often complained about it. This was one of her

most prominent transitional issues. She became bored due to the cyclical repetition of familiar content and the simple tasks she was assigned.

Another problem was the teacher. Although Eva liked her primary school English teacher at the beginning of primary school, she soon became one of her greatest demotivators. Eva's expectations were not met by the teacher, who treated all children as if they were on the same level. Eva saw no progress and was dissatisfied with herself. Her motivation was declining. Fortunately, she improved and perfected her knowledge during private English lessons; she felt proud, and most importantly, she had a strong desire to learn and use English. She knew she was progressing faster and enjoyed using only English. We can conclude that Eva had a different self-concept as an EFL learner and herself as an out-of-school EFL learner.

Eva liked learning English in pre-primary, and throughout the research period, she continued to enjoy learning English in an out-of-school environment, i.e., in her private lessons at home, as much as she did at the pre-primary age. This suggests that her pre-primary English classes did not guarantee English learning satisfaction in primary school, which can be associated with continuity and coherence issues.

She maintained her positive attitude toward the English language itself. Still, she developed a less than positive attitude toward English as a school subject, which reflects her feelings that she was not learning new things, especially compared to other school subjects. This suggests another prominent demotivator for Eva, a mismatch between her proficiency in English and language input in primary school.

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

Based on a longitudinal case study, this master's thesis intended to examine the motivation of a primary school student who started learning English very early, at the pre-primary level. The research consisted of two primary interviews with Eva, the first one when she was in the first grade of primary school and the second one when she was in the fourth grade, as well as observations during the private English lessons and discussions between Eva and her tutor at home.



We intended to examine her attitudes toward the English language, attitudes toward language learning at school and outside of school, the differences between teaching at school and learning outside of school, and to examine her motivation for learning English.

The research results showed a significant drop in motivation between the first and the last interview, which could also be noticed in the tutor's observations throughout the research period. At the beginning of primary school, due to a change in the environment and a new way of learning that challenged Eva because it was different from what she had encountered before, she was motivated to learn English at school. English made her happy, and she felt proud of herself and her knowledge.

As time passed, Eva's motivation level began to decline. Reasons for this are boredom in class and the constant repetition of content that Eva had already mastered. Another important reason was Eva's attitude towards her teacher. Eva was not happy with her school English teacher as she seldom gave her chances to give answers in class, and she was different from her pre-primary English teacher and her private tutor. The teacher was the reason that stood out the most in this research. Due to the drop in motivation and the habit she had acquired since the first grade of primary school, Eva did not study English for tests, which could be a problem in the future.

On the other hand, Eva was motivated in her private English lessons, which were tailored to her level, wishes, and knowledge, and her progress was really visible. When talking about the differences in the approach to teaching, Eva preferred pre-primary over primary, as well as out-of-school English over English at school.

For further research, it may be useful to explore the oscillation in English language learning motivation during the transition period more deeply and repeat this longitudinal case study on a larger sample. Also, it may be interesting to conduct research with adult users of the English language who started learning English at an early age as well and to explore their experiences and progress, as well as today's attitudes towards the English language.

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## Summary

Ovaj diplomski rad, na temelju longitudinalne studije slučaja, nastoji proučiti motivaciju jedne učenice nižih razreda osnovne škole koja je, kao dio predškolskog obrazovanja, učila Engleski jezik.

Teorijski, rad prije svega proučava tranziciju između predškolskog i osnovnoškolskog obrazovanja, posebno s aspekta nastave Engleskog jezika. Osim same tranzicije, rad definira motivaciju i navodi vrste motivacije najrelevantnije za ovo istraživanje, a to su intrinzična i ekstrinzična motivacija. Nadalje, navodi čimbenike koji utječu na motivaciju, kao što su dob, koherentnost i kontinuitet u tranziciji, uloga roditelja, nastavnika i vršnjaka, zahtjevnost zadataka koje učenici rješavaju, samopoimanje i samopouzdanje. Također, rad navodi čimbenike koji demotiviraju osnovnoškolske učenike.

Rezultati ukazuju na činjenicu da je osnovnoškolska učenica, subjekt istraživanja, koja je u predškolskom obrazovanju počela učiti Engleski jezik, i koja ga je do određene razine usvojila, suočena s ponekim teškoćama u nastavi Engleskog jezika u osnovnoj školi. Kao najistaknutije teškoće navode se demotiviranost, dosada i utjecaj na samopouzdanje. S druge strane, osnovnoškolska učenica s predznanjem Engleskog jezika koja je bila subjekt ovog istraživanja, ima veliki potencijal koji, ako se njeguje na pravi način, može dovesti do velikih uspjeha u učenju Engleskog jezika.

Ključne riječi: tranzicija između predškolskog i školskog obrazovanja, rano učenje jezika, motivacija, osnovnoškolski učenici

## 6. Appendix

### **Main interview questions – First interview, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

*1 What is your favorite school subject?*

*2 What do you like most about English classes (this year)? Why?*

*3 What do you like least about English classes (this year)? Why?*

*4 What do you think: do you learn English faster, slower, or the same as others in the class? How do you know? Who is the best in English?*

*5 Are your parents satisfied with what you are learning in English? How do you know that?*

*6 Do your parents/brothers/sisters help you learn English? How do they help you? How often do they help you?*

*7 Have you ever met someone who does not speak Croatian? Could you say something to them in English? Did you understand them? How did you feel then?*

*8 Do you ever hear English at home? Where? How often? Do you watch cartoons in English at home? And do you play any games in English at home?*

*9 Do you ever use English in conversations with your friends?*

*10 And do you like the way you learn English at school? How do you learn English at school?*

*11 When the teacher asks you something, do you first think of what you are going to say, or do you start speaking and then think about it?*

*12 What can English come in handy for in your life?*

*13 What do you think is the best language to learn? Why?*

*14 Do you study English outside of school? Where? Why? Who decided that you should study English outside of school?*

*15 Do you like learning English more at school or outside of school? Why?*

*16 Do you see any differences in learning English at school and outside of school? Which ones?*

*17 What did you like most about classes outside of school? Why?*

*18 What didn't you like about English classes outside of school? Why?*

*19 Who was the best student of English outside of school? Explain why he/she was the best.*

*20 When you started first grade, did you know English better than others in your class? What did you know that they did not?*

*21 Do you still know English better, or do you know it as well as others in the class? What do you know better?*

*22 How did you like the English teacher in your classes outside of school?*

*23 Was she different from your current teacher at school?*

**Main interview questions – Second interview, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

*1 What is your favorite school subject?*

*2 Do you like English?*

*3 Can you describe your English classes at school?*

*4 What do you like?*

*5 Is there something you do not like?*

*6 Do you think you are good at English when you compare yourself to your classmates?  
Why is that?*

*7 Do you think your parents are happy with English classes at your school?*

*8 How do you feel during your English class?*

*9 How do you feel when you are doing your homework? When you study for tests?*

*10 How do you feel when you get an A? How do you feel when you get the same grade  
as another pupil in your class?*

*11 How do you feel when you speak English outside of school?*

*12 When do you speak English?*

*13 Where do you learn English now? Can you describe the classes? How do we learn?*

*14 Do you think you have come a long way since you started learning?*

*15 How do you learn English? How do you learn words and grammar?*

*18 Do you like learning English?*

*19 Do you like preparing for English tests in school?*

*20 What would you like your school English classes to be like? What would you like to do more of? What would you like to do less of?*