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EARLY LEARNING OF SPANISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN CROATIA: THE LEARNER PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT: Compulsory foreign language learning at the age of 6–7 followed by optional learning of a second foreign language at the age of 10 was introduced in all Croatian primary schools in 2003. Spanish, as the fifth foreign language learned in Croatia, has only recently been offered as a second foreign language. The article presents results of qualitative research conducted by means of a questionnaire with Croatian learners of Spanish as a foreign language aged 9–15 (N=134) with the aim of examining their motivation to learn Spanish and inquiring about their attitudes towards the learning situation in the school context. The results suggest that participants exhibited a positive initial motivational profile and positive attitudes towards the learning situation with some differences between younger and older learners. Based on these research results, a wider presence of Spanish as a second foreign language in primary schools across the country is recommended.

Key words: attitudes, early learning of Spanish as a foreign language, Croatian learners, motivation.

RANO UČENJE ŠPANSKOG KAO STRANOG JEZIKA U HRVATSKOJ: PERSPEKTIVA UČENIKA

APSTRAKT: Obavezno učenje stranog jezika u dobi od 6–7 godina uvedeno je 2023. u svim hrvatskim osnovnim školama, praćeno izbornim učenjem drugog stranog jezika sa 10 godina. Španski, kao peti strani jezik koji se uči u Hrvatskoj, tek je nedavno ponuđen kao drugi strani jezik. U članku su prikazani rezultati kvalitativnog istraživanja provedenog putem upitnika s hrvatskim učenicima španskog kao stranog jezika od 9 do 15 godina (N=134) s ciljem ispitivanja njihove motivacije za učenjem španskog i njihovih stavova prema situaciji učenja u školskom kontekstu. Rezultati sugerišu da su učesnici pokazali pozitivan početni motivacioni profil i pozitivne stavove prema situaciji učenja s određenim razlikama između mlađih i starijih učenika. Na osnovu ovih rezultata istraživanja, preporučuje se šire prisustvo španskog kao drugog stranog jezika u osnovnim školama širom zemlje.

Ključne reči: stavovi, rano učenje španskog kao stranog jezika, hrvatski učenici, motivacija.

1. INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism and language competences have for a long time been considered as being at the heart of the European idea since they play a key role in citizens' cross-cultural and cross-border understanding, learning, cooperation, and mobility. In the majority of educational systems across Europe learners are included in early foreign language learning programs. As far as the first foreign language is concerned, the age of onset is usually between 6 and 8 years (in some countries even earlier), while learners start learning a second foreign language in late years of primary school or at the beginning of secondary education (European Commission 2023). The concept of young learners¹ thus mostly refers to learners until they complete their primary education, i.e. up to around the age of 15 (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov 2019). However, while learning the first foreign language is compulsory in most countries, the learning of two foreign languages depends on the country's language policy and is more of "an entitlement than an obligation" (European Commission 2023: 21). English is a mandatory foreign language in almost all European educational systems and thus most learnt by primary and secondary school students. French and German are most frequently chosen as the second foreign language, while in some countries Spanish is also present mostly at the secondary (lower or upper) level of education (European Commission 2023). The present paper presents the role and place of Spanish as a second foreign language in Croatian primary schools and gives an insight into young learners' motivation to learn that language and into their attitudes towards the learning situation in the school context.

2. EARLY FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CROATIA

Early foreign language (FL) learning in Croatia has a long tradition. FL learning and teaching dates back to the first decades of the twentieth century and it was often conditioned by a series of extra-linguistic factors, mostly of political and social origin (Vilke 2019). The same applies to the place of individual FLs (the first FL being compulsory and the second FL being optional) in school curricula,

¹ The term 'very young learners' is used in relation to pre-school FL learners (Mihaljević Djigunović 2012).

although, in general, the languages represented were English, French, German, Italian and Russian. Pupils started learning FLs at the age of 10–11.

It is during the 1970s, when English was already a dominant FL, the first attempts to investigate the potential of introducing FL learning at an earlier age were made (Vilke 2015, 2019). The aim was to educate “competent bilingual speakers throughout the country” (Vilke 2015: 17) who would effectively use the knowledge of FLs (mostly English) in personal and professional life. Although the results were quite promising and the data gave a valuable insight into the early FL learning process, educational authorities unfortunately failed to provide the required financial and other support.

A new attempt was made in 1991 (Vilke & Vrhovac 1993, 1995; Vrhovac 1999, 2001) when early learning of English, French and German was introduced in the first grade (learners aged 6–7) of 12 primary schools in Zagreb, financed by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Croatia and educational authorities of the city of Zagreb. Italian was also introduced on a different organizational basis and the following year a number of schools in other larger urban areas joined the project. The aim was to develop young learners’ communicative competence, having in mind their language progress throughout the 12 years of the schooling system. The FL was taught for five 45-minute periods a week in groups of up to 15 pupils by teachers who held a university degree and who acquired additional teaching competence to work with young learners. The results suggested that young learners, under favorable classroom conditions, could achieve admirable language learning results. These conditions, among others, referred to smaller groups, everyday exposure to the FL in school, age-appropriate classroom activities and teaching materials, with an emphasis placed on pronunciation, fluency, and motivating and competent teachers. The project is today referred to as the “Zagreb school” of early FL learning (Vilke 2019).

As of 2003, the first FL has been a compulsory FL for all first graders (Letica Krevelj 2019). It is taught for two 45-minute periods from the first to the fourth grade, and for three 45-minute periods from the fifth to the eighth grade. Teaching and learning are organized with whole classes, amounting up to 30 pupils. Pupils can opt for a second FL as of the fourth grade of primary school and it is taught for two 45-minute periods until the end of primary school, i.e. the eighth grade. As it is an optional subject, pupils can also opt to drop out after each grade. According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2023), most pupils (or their parents) choose English as their first FL (almost 90%), followed by German (9%). Italian, French, Hungarian, Slovakian, Czech, Russian and other languages are all

chosen by 1% of pupils. Foreign language as an optional subject in the fourth grade is chosen by 42% of pupils and in the majority of cases the second foreign language is German (Letica Krevelj 2019).

3. LEARNING SPANISH IN CROATIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

As far as the early learning of Spanish in the Croatian context is concerned, it has only recently been introduced as an optional subject and a second FL in a limited number of classrooms in several large urban areas across the country.² Spanish is the fifth most often learned FL in the Croatian educational system (Kapović 2022). According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2023), at the beginning of the school year 2022/2023, a total of 395 pupils aged 9–14 studied it as their second FL in primary school. The greatest number of pupils attended Grade 4 (28%) and the number of pupils in each subsequent year decreased (25% in Grade 5; 21% in Grade 6; 14% in Grade 7 and 12% in Grade 8).³

The Subject Curriculum for Spanish as a Foreign Language was adopted in 2020. It falls within the reform movements in the Croatian education system marked by several policy documents, among other, the national Strategy for Education, Science and Technology from 2014, the National Curriculum Framework⁴ from 2017, national curricula for particular educational levels and for seven curricular areas (i.e. a language-communication area relevant in this case). Overall, they enabled setting clearer learning goals and learning outcomes leading to a holistic student development as well as changing the paradigm of the teaching process within which teachers have a greater autonomy in choosing the content, methods and teaching strategies. The policy documents were the basis for a

² It is present in four out of twenty-one Croatian counties: Dubrovnik-Neretva, Primorje-Gorski Kotar, Split-Dalmatia and the City of Zagreb (Kapović 2022).

³ This could be explained in various ways, for example by the fact that an increasing number of pupils is choosing Spanish as their second foreign language in Grade 4 but also by the fact that they can opt to drop out after each grade.

⁴ National Framework Curriculum (Nacionalni okvirni kurikulum) was adopted in 2011 and is considered as the first attempt to reform the Croatian education system so it could respond to the demands of the knowledge-based society.

Comprehensive Curriculum Reform⁵ (or the so-called “School for Life”) which has been implemented since 2019⁶.

The subject Curriculum for Spanish as a Foreign Language (2020) sets the purpose and the goals of learning and teaching Spanish in Croatian schools, the structure of the subject in the educational vertical, learning outcomes, descriptions of learning outcome attainment levels, and covers other general learning, teaching and assessment issues. Learning outcomes and descriptions of learning outcomes attainment levels are determined for each year of learning and teaching.

The curriculum is based on the communicative approach, with the learner being at the center of the teaching process. It is rooted in the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume (Council of Europe 2020) and the Curricular Plan of the Cervantes Institute (Instituto Cervantes 2012). The aim is to develop learners’ communicative competence, promote intercultural understanding and prepare them for autonomous lifelong learning.

Communicative competence is developed within receptive and productive language skills. Lexical and grammar progression is adapted to pupils’ cognitive development. In the first years, Spanish is learned by means of imitation, playful activities, repetition of linguistic patterns and interaction, first in the oral and then in the written form. As of the age of 12, metalanguage is slowly introduced and linguistic awareness promoted. Types of texts are also adapted to learners’ age and interests and vary from short forms and dialogues to somewhat more complex authentic texts, always depending on the learners’ experience, age and level of linguistic knowledge. Linguistic structures are introduced in their communicative context. Assessment is conceived as formative and summative and aimed at evaluating learners’ performance within receptive and productive skills. At the end of their primary school, pupils learning Spanish as a second foreign language are expected to achieve A1+ level (for the first foreign language the expected level is A2).

As far as learning material⁷ is concerned, it is authored by Spanish authors, based on the same abovementioned principles, and enables pupils to encounter and

⁵ For a detailed overview: <http://www.kurikulum.hr>.

⁶ Preceded by a pilot-project implemented in a limited number of schools and grades in the school year 2018/2019 (Evaluation of the experimental programme “School for Life” in the school year 2018/2019, 2019).

discover the modern Hispanic world. Throughout the textbook, young learners are accompanied by their peers, young reporters, originating from Spain and various other Hispanic countries who find themselves in everyday communication situations which provide a framework for developing learners' communication and intercultural competence. Learning material is rich in cultural content in the form of semi-authentic and authentic input. It is also conceived in a way to enable the development of metacognition and learning strategies. Many ludic elements are present as well, including in the digital environment. Various individual and group age-appropriate tasks, activities and projects promote creativity, interaction as well as autonomous learning.

4. RESEARCHING MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES OF YOUNG FL LEARNERS

Motivation and attitudes of young learners towards FL learning and teaching are learners' affective characteristics that have been drawing attention of various scholars for several decades. In general terms, motivation encompasses the desire to learn the language, positive attitudes to learning it and the intensity or effort invested in learning (Gardner 2010), while attitudes mostly refer to positive or negative beliefs and opinions about a language (Gardner & MacIntyre 1993) or the learning context (Mihaljević Djigunović 2015a, 2015b). Motivation is seen as a "key learner variable" (Cohen & Dörnyei 2002: 152) in all age groups. Since these two constructs are closely interrelated, they are often researched together.

When motivation is studied in the FL classroom setting, according to Dörnyei (1994: 280) three levels should be taken into consideration: (a) the language level (integrative and instrumental aspects of motivation or orientations and motives of language learning which affect, for example, the choice of the language to be learned), (b) the learner level (the personal dimension of language learning) and c) the learning situation level (intrinsic and extrinsic motives connected with the classroom environment).

⁷ For learners aged 9–10 to 14–15 (Grade 4–Grade 8) the learning material approved by the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education is the series *Reporteros Internacionales 1, 2 and 3*, (VV.AA, Difusión).

Although motivational research with young FL learners originates from various models and theories proposed for older learners,⁸ it revealed to be a particular phenomenon with its own sources and characteristics. Hence, Mihaljević Djigunović and Nikolov (2019) proposed a research framework suitable for this particular group of FL learners which takes into account the following domains: (i) young learners' three overlapping developmental stages: ages 6–8, ages 9–11 and ages 12–14, which require different classroom activities, tasks and assessment practices adapted to learners' cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics; (ii) the role of valued others, i.e., family members, teachers and peers, in FL learning which takes place within the abovementioned stages, (iii) tasks and other classroom events and their role in the teaching and learning process, and (iv) a wider educational context in which FL learning takes place and its motivating power.

In the Croatian context, attitudes and motivation of young FL learners have been examined in relation to English, French, German and Italian (Mihaljević Djigunović 2015a, 2015b; Vilke & Vrhovac 1993, 1995; Vrhovac 1999, 2019). The findings suggested both similarities and differences among learners of particular foreign languages were related to contexts, learning conditions, and other variables (Mihaljević Djigunović 2015a, 2015b). As data on motivation and attitudes of Croatian learners of Spanish as a foreign language are scarce, the present study proposes to shed light on this topic.

5. MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES OF CROATIAN YOUNG LEARNERS TO LEARN SPANISH

5.1. *Aim*

The aim of this study was to examine Croatian young learners' motivation to learn Spanish as an optional subject and to inquire about their attitudes towards the learning situation in the school context.

5.2. *Participants*

The study included 134 learners (80 girls and 54 boys) of Spanish as a FL in Croatian primary schools in three large urban areas across the country. They

⁸ Two dichotomous ones are particularly influential: Gardner and Lambert's (1972) conceptualization of integrative and instrumental orientations and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation types proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985).

were between the ages of 9 and 15 ($M=11.57$; $SD=1.45$) and attended Grades 4 to 8. The highest number of pupils attended Grade 4 (29%), 22% were in Grade 5, 25% were in Grade 6, 9% in Grade 7 and 15% in Grade 8.

5.3. Data collection instrument and procedure

The instrument used was a questionnaire administered in the studies conducted by Nikolov (1999) and Mihaljević Djigunović (2015a, 2015b) with learners of English but adapted for Spanish language learning. It consisted of six open questions in Croatian:

1. Why do you learn Spanish?
2. What are your first three favourite subjects?
3. What are the school subjects (if any) you dislike?
4. What do you enjoy doing the most in Spanish classes?
5. What do you dislike in Spanish classes?
6. If you were the teacher, what would you do differently?

The first question inquired about the reasons young learners think they learn Spanish. The second and the third question were aimed at finding out about the place of Spanish among other school subjects. In the fourth and the fifth questions the participants were asked to name activities they liked or disliked in their Spanish classes while the sixth question gave them the opportunity to provide some suggestions about their Spanish classes.

In the demographic section, questions elicited information on the participants' gender, age, and grade in Spanish as a school subject.

The qualitative study was conducted in spring 2023. The participants filled in the questionnaire in a paper and pencil format at school, during their regular Spanish class, in about 15 minutes.

The data were transcribed, coded, categorised, and analysed. For the first question on the reasons to learn Spanish, a coding system was developed based on the themes emerging from the data and they were organized in three categories reported in Nikolov (1999): classroom-related reasons, utilitarian reasons and external reasons. For the fourth, the fifth and the sixth questions, themes were organized into categories representing types of tasks and activities young learners liked and disliked as well as critical opinions and suggestions they formulated. The answers were independently coded by the investigator and a researcher in the field of SLA. Inter-coder reliability was high (90%) and disagreements were resolved through discussion.

5.4. Results and discussion

5.4.1. Reasons for learning Spanish

The first question addressed the issue of motivation to learn Spanish as a second language and an optional subject in Croatian primary schools. The responses were grouped into three categories: classroom-related reasons, utilitarian reasons and external reasons (Nikolov 1999). The frequencies of learners' 276 reasons distributed by their age (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov 2019), i.e. younger learners aged 9–11 attending Grades 4 and 5 and older learners aged 12–15 attending Grades 6, 7 and 8 are shown in Table 1. Some learners mentioned more than one reason to learn Spanish.

	Younger learners (aged 9–11) N = 69	Older learners (aged 12–15) N = 65	Total
Classroom-related reasons	21	22	43
Utilitarian reasons	29	58	87
External reasons	6	2	8

Table 1. Croatian Young Learners' Reasons to Learn Spanish

As far as younger learners are concerned, classroom-related reasons mostly included two types: a) 'it's interesting', 'it's fun' or 'it's cool' (12 answers in total) and b) 'I like it' (6 answers). One learner learned Spanish because it was offered in school, one just to see how it was to learn Spanish and another one because he could not drop out. Utilitarian reasons ranged from general statements such as 'for the future' (5 answers), through the feeling that 'it is good to know several languages' (5 answers) to specific areas of use such as travel (5 answers), communication ('So I could talk to people who officially speak Spanish') (7 answers) or career opportunities (7 answers), including as football players in la Liga. The answers related to external motives included mostly the answer 'parents told me to learn Spanish' (5 answers), while one learner is learning the language because of his brother.

In relation to older learners, classroom-related reasons included the same two types as with the younger ones: a) 'it's interesting' and 'it's fun' (10 answers in total) and b) 'I like it' (9 answers). One learner learned Spanish because it was offered in school, one because he got good grades and another one because it was easy. Utilitarian reasons predominantly included the feeling that knowledge of several languages is useful ('To know the third language because most people

speak their mother tongue and English’) (22 answers), although future educational perspective (12 answers) as well as travel (11 answers) and communication opportunities (11 answers) were present as well. Two older learners mentioned career opportunities (‘So I could have a better chance to get a job’). External reasons included the influence of parents with two learners who mentioned it.

Croatian young learners of Spanish as a second FL showed a positive motivational outlook. Utilitarian reasons, i.e. instrumental motivation, were quite prominent, followed by classroom-related reasons and, to a much lesser extent, external reasons. This partially confirmed the findings of Nikolov (1999): young learners projected in the future mentioning the situations in which the knowledge of Spanish would be useful for them, they were quite enthusiastic about their classroom setting which provided a good Spanish learning environment and external reasons played a minor role in learners’ motivation. However, unlike the study of Nikolov (1999), the teacher as the motivator was not explicitly mentioned in any of the learners’ responses and the young learners might have intuitively blended it with classroom-related reasons.

The comparison of younger and older learners has revealed more similarities than differences. For both groups utilitarian reasons were predominant although, as reported in Nikolov (1999), the age-related increase could be observed. Both groups shared the feeling that knowing additional languages was useful. They were also well aware of various areas where they could use Spanish, i.e. communication, travel and education/job prospects. This is overall in line with the findings on Croatian young learners of other FLs (Mihaljević Djigunović 2015b), who were also aware of practical benefits of knowing a FL but some variation among the languages appeared as well: learners of English, for example, underlined communication and travel benefits more frequently than learners of French and German, while more learners of French and German recognized education and job opportunities than learners of English. In addition, in our study, both groups seemed to appreciate their Spanish language classes, which has already been reported as an important factor in early FL learning in other contexts (Nikolov 1999; Mihaljević Djigunović 2015a, 2015b; Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov 2019). External reasons, which in the present study mostly refer to the role of parents as valued others, tended to decrease with age, which is in line with the framework proposed by Mihaljević Djigunović and Nikolov (2019).

5.4.2. Spanish among other school subjects

The second and the third questions from the questionnaire were aimed at gaining a better understanding about the place of Spanish among other school subjects. Young learners identified a variety of popular and unpopular subjects. Spanish was never listed among the disliked ones. The data on how often Spanish was rated among the three preferred subjects are shown in Diagram 1.

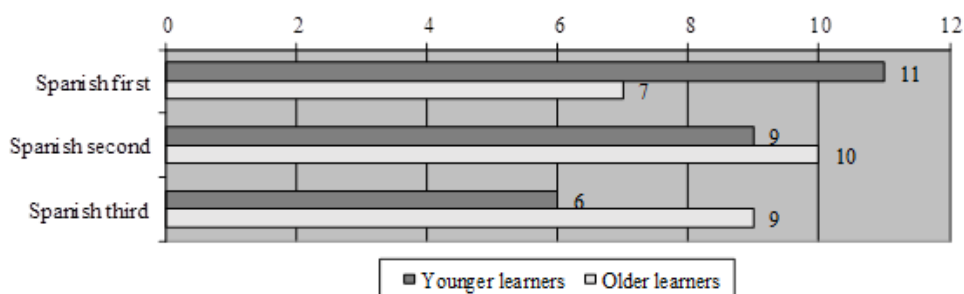


Diagram 1. Number of Young Learners Choosing Spanish as First, Second or Third Most-liked Subject

The data suggested that more than a third of learners (38% of younger ones and 40% of older ones) listed Spanish among their three favourite subjects. The majority of young learners placed it in the first place while the majority of older ones chose the second place for Spanish. The findings indicated an overall positive attitude towards Spanish as a school subject but some variation between younger and older learners may be observed in the sense that the younger ones to a certain extent liked Spanish as a school subject more than the older ones.

Other studies also reported on enthusiasm towards languages as school subjects. In the Croatian context, Mihaljević Djigunović (2015b), for example, reported that about one third of Croatian young learners of English or French mentioned them as the most favourite subject while young learners of German did it much less frequently. In addition, in that study the increase in positive attitudes regarding English and French was also noticed over a two-year period. Age-related changes, i.e. differences between younger and older learners in relation to how they rate English among other school subjects, were also revealed by Nikolov in the Hungarian context (1999).

4.4.3. Attitudes towards Spanish classroom activities

In general, learners listed many more activities that they liked (109 answers) than that they disliked (56 answers).

Both age groups shared the same preferred activities. All learners were particularly fond of games (51 answers) in the Spanish language classroom, which included online games, quizzes and, above all, Kahoot (24 answers). Entertainment in the Spanish language classroom was also important for both age groups: younger learners just called it ‘having fun’ (7 answers) while older learners specified that they liked ‘fun or creative learning methods’ (9 answers). Fifteen learners liked communication and interaction activities in the classroom while thirteen of them mentioned ‘learning new vocabulary’. The teacher as the favorite element of the classroom was mentioned by six learners, other six learners liked everything in their Spanish classes while two of them mentioned a relaxed and positive atmosphere. Two learners reported that they did not like anything. Many learners (42 answers) had no dislikes to report. Negative answers which appeared most frequently were related to discipline (12 answers) and the teacher’s angry behavior regarding it (9 answers). In addition, learners complained about having to copy or write too much in their notebooks/textbooks (14 answers), tests (8 answers), the textbook (5 answers) and grammar lessons (4 answers). Four more learners disliked that Spanish classes were organised late in the afternoon, after regular school hours.

Croatian young learners’ positive motivational outlook towards learning Spanish as their second foreign language is reflected in their attitudes towards classroom activities, regardless of their age group. In general, they showed enthusiasm for ludic activities, especially in the digital environment, coupled with communication and interaction tasks, with an emphasis on learning new vocabulary. Young learners mostly complained about the discipline issues and the teacher’s unpleasant behavior provoked by disobedient classmates, copying and writing in their notebooks and tests. Five learners did not like their textbook. Similar tendencies were reported by both Nikolov (1999) and Mihaljević Djigunović (2015b) in relation to other FLs. However, the shift towards playful activities in the digital environment which were, understandably, not present in the studies from 2000s, was quite prominent and requires further attention. The digital world the young learners nowadays live in has a profound impact on them in numerous ways so the educational system, including foreign language teaching, needs to cater for young learners’ needs in this new reality.

4.4.4. *Young learners' suggestions and criticism*

As far as young learners' suggestions are concerned, they proposed that more games (21 answers), more visual input, i.e. videos, movies, series, (7 answers) and music (4 answers) could be present. These findings are particularly important for teaching practice since they represent intrinsically motivating activities for learners. Previous research showed that it is the type of activity which seems to play a major role in young learners' motivated behavior in the context of early FL learning in the classroom (Nikolov 1999; Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov 2019). In addition, they related their suggestions to the elements that they disliked, for example better discipline (6 answers), less writing (3 answers) or new textbooks (3 answers). Six learners wrote simply 'I don't know'. The demand for stricter classroom norms was also reported by Nikolov (1999). And yet, many learners did not have any suggestions that could bring change into their Spanish language classes (36 answers).

6. CONCLUSION

Spanish is the fifth foreign language learned in the Croatian educational system and has only recently been introduced as a second foreign language at the primary school level. The subject curriculum, based on communicative language learning and teaching principles, represents a good framework for teachers as it enables the development of learners' communicative competence, intercultural understanding and autonomous learning. Age-appropriate textbooks authored by Spanish authors and approved by the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education are also conceived on the basis of the same principles.

Young learners exhibited a positive motivational profile regarding Spanish language learning, with instrumental orientations and quite a clear vision of the areas of possible future use of Spanish, i.e. communication, travel and educational/job prospects. Above all, they shared the position that the knowledge of several foreign languages was useful. An age-related increase could be observed related to utilitarian reasons and an age-related decrease connected with external reasons (i.e. the role of parents as valued others).

Classroom setting also revealed to be motivating for Croatian young learners and these results are supported by their positive attitude towards Spanish as a school subject. This is particularly important since insights from previous studies underline the strong impact classroom tends to have on young learners' motivation (Mihaljević Djigunović & Nikolov 2019). The comparison of the

younger and the older group of learners within the cohort (up to 12 years and from 12 years onwards) revealed more similarities than differences. They all preferred playful activities, especially in the digital environment, and those including communication and interaction in Spanish. They expressed criticism about the classroom discipline and they disliked copying and writing in their notebooks and tests. Although some suggestions are provided for improving classroom learning, more than a third of learners did not express any criticism about their Spanish learning experience. They mostly advocated for a more frequent use of ludic activities, as well as visual and auditive input.

Findings on Croatian young learners of Spanish are seen as the first step towards understanding this group of pupils and there is still much to be learned about their individual characteristics and the features of their learning environment, their learning processes and their level of attainment in Spanish. In addition to qualitative methodology, further research on this topic should also include mixed-method studies, interviews and classroom observation sessions. However, the present positive results could be an argument for introducing Spanish as a foreign language on a larger scale in primary schools across the country.

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RANO UČENJE ŠPANSKOG KAO STRANOG JEZIKA U HRVATSKOJ:
PERSPEKTIVA UČENIKA

Sažetak

U svim hrvatskim osnovnim školama 2003. godine uvedeno je obavezno učenje stranog jezika u dobi od 6–7 godina, a zatim izborno učenje drugog stranog jezika u dobi od 10 godina. Španski, kao peti strani jezik koji se uči u Hrvatskoj, tek je nedavno uveden kao drugi strani jezik u ograničenom broju škola u velikim urbanim sredinama. Nastava se zasniva na Predmetnom planu i programu za španski kao strani jezik (2020) sa ciljem da se kod učenika razvije komunikativna kompetencija, promoviše interkulturalno razumevanje i da se pripreme za autonomno celoživotno učenje. Nastavni materijal prilagođen uzrastu španskih autora odobrilo je nadležno Ministarstvo. U radu su prikazani rezultati kvalitativnog istraživanja sprovedenog sa 134 učenika španskog kao stranog jezika iz tri osnovne škole. Učenici pokazuju pozitivan motivacioni profil u pogledu učenja španskog jezika sa određenim razlikama između mlađih i starijih učenika. Njihova instrumentalna orijentacija i jasna vizija oblasti moguće buduće upotrebe španskog jezika, odnosno komunikacije, putovanja i mogućnosti obrazovanja i zaposlenja, prilično su istaknuti. Okruženje u učionici za njih je motivirajuće i imaju pozitivne stavove prema situaciji učenja. Preferiraju igre, posebno u digitalnom okruženju, i aktivnosti koje uključuju komunikaciju i interakciju na španskom. Izražavaju kritike na račun discipline u učionici i ne vole da prepisuju i pišu u sveske, kao ni testove. Iako su dali neke predloge za poboljšanje učenja, više od trećine učenika nisu imali kritike o svom iskustvu učenja španskog jezika. Uglavnom se zalažu za češću upotrebu ludičkih aktivnosti, vizuelnog i auditivnog inputa. Na osnovu ovih rezultata istraživanja, preporučuje se šire prisustvo španskog kao drugog stranog jezika u osnovnim školama širom zemlje.

Ključne reči: stavovi, rano učenje španskog kao stranog jezika, hrvatski učenici, motivacija.

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