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Factors that influence attitudes towards early foreign language learning in Slovenia

Abstract: *The paper presents the research results into young learners' attitudes towards their first foreign language (FL 1) according to their age and grade. A 406-strong sample of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders participated. The results showed no statistically significant differences in the T-test, whereas the results from the ANOVA and the Bonferroni post-hoc test showed statistically significant correlations, establishing that the attitudes of the fourth graders and partly third graders differ significantly from those of the second graders for most of the items. The discourse of primary school class teachers with ESP training might have triggered the formation of different attitudes among students in comparison to general training in philology. Hence, an age- and grade-appropriate teacher training certainly makes all the difference.*

Keywords: *Young learners, ESP, foreign language learning, philology, state elementary school.*

Introduction

Early language learning has attracted a great deal of attention from academics and practitioners alike, particularly because of the impact of age on the formation of attitudes towards foreign languages (henceforth FL). The subject had already been addressed in the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Rivers 1965; Jakobovits 1970; Lambert, 1972). Cameron (2001: 1) reaffirmed the claim of the previously mentioned authors in stating that foreign language

teaching for young foreign language learners differs from teaching adults or adolescents. Indeed, young learners are more enthusiastic and livelier than older learners, they will often engage in an activity even if they do not fully understand the aims, and they are more concerned about pleasing the teacher than their peers. In an ideal case, effective learning will occur, if “a stimulating and rich linguistic environment is provided” (Winskel et al., 2017: 142). Winskel et al. further state that “children need to be given many opportunities to be actively engaged and interact with others. This can be quite a challenge

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in the FL classroom, as typically children learning in this context have little exposure to the language outside of the classroom.” (2017, *ibid.*). Young children may also be less self-conscious than older children and adolescents (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 1994). On the other hand, young learners tend to lose interest quickly and find it difficult to stay motivated and focused (*ibid.*), they also have fewer resources than adults and are less able to analyse language in an abstract way (Pinter, 2006: 17). Therefore, young learners are not as free as adult learners to make hypotheses about the characteristics of another language (Pinter, 2006: 18).

Early FL teaching is a complex psychological-pedagogical phenomenon, because it involves many factors of a positive learning outcome, including one of great importance, namely the learners’ motivation to learn, if we mention only one of the indirectly important factors influencing the quality of FL competence (Brumen et al., 2015: 29). Moreover, we could state that “motivation is a factor that strongly influences all forms of learning” (Jazbec et al., 2016: 126). Other equally important factors are the richness, abundance and constant study of the language (Muñoz, 2016). This is especially important in the first cycle of primary school (grades 1 to 3), as children begin their educational process as a kind of *tabula rasa*, which is completely contradictory to the facts. In fact, children enter the process of FL learning with far more experience of life and the language they are learning (Smajla, 2014: 116). In addition, children have natural abilities that help them in learning in general and promote the process of learning the foreign language towards which they have already adopted an attitude (Moon, 2005). Furthermore, MacIntyre et al. (2002, quoted in Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012: 57) believe that “young learners vary considerably in their motivation, positive attitude and in the presence or absence of learning difficulties”. Their concentration span is short, which means that a foreign language teacher needs to be well-equipped with motivating activities, therefore teachers or other adults involved in

the teaching process should take into consideration the specific behaviour of children and their characteristics when choosing an appropriate teaching approach (Smajla, 2014: 119) or utilize age-appropriate methods and tools, which is a prerequisite throughout the teaching process. In contrast to young learners, Lee & Oxford (2008) claimed that adult learners have shown high use of metacognitive strategies such as planning, organizing, and evaluating their own Second Language (L2) learning, strategies that young learners do not possess.

Young foreign language learners and their characteristics

Young learners in primary school are keen on learning a foreign language and they are able to achieve good results if learning a foreign language takes place in an adequately intensive foreign language environment. From the preschool age onwards, they are confronted with their peers or older pupils who may come from various language backgrounds and cultural settings. Furthermore, they live in an environment with a high L 2 input from different media (Ministrstvo za izobraževanje, znanost, kulturo in šport 2012). Due to globalization and immigration, schoolmates originating from different corners of the globe often surround young learners. In doing research with younger FL learners, one should bear in mind that pupils of a young age have quite specific characteristics, such as the similarities or differences of the pupil’s mother tongue to the FL. A pupil’s positive attitude toward his/her mother tongue leads to a more stable language subsystem, which in turn enables a more efficient and easier development of foreign language competences (Ministrstvo za izobraževanje, znanost in šport 2013: 8).

Other authors have confirmed that teaching at an early age is different, among them Curtain (1990), who summarised the advantages of FL teaching at an early age. In fact, Curtain claims that

young learners who learn a foreign language before the age of 10 acquire certain abilities that boost their cognitive competencies as well as their development of the basic competences, such as reading and writing. Furthermore, she maintains that learning a foreign language favours the student's retention abilities as well as his/her communication competences. Besides, Curtain claims that exposure to the "foreign" leads to certain cognitive changes, which had been argued previously by Piaget. By confronting cognitive conflicts, a student forms a new way of thinking. In that situation young children who are confronted by two languages from an early age onward are able to reach a considerable level of cognitive development when compared to their monolingual peers (*ibid.*).

Moreover, three other factors need to be considered in early language learning, namely the context, the socio-political rationale, and the teacher's expertise (Enever, 2016: 355). Thus, contexts vary from extracurricular private language schools to state school classrooms (Enever, 2016: 353). Pedagogical approaches vary accordingly and therefore produce different outcomes. Where English is used as the medium of instruction (EMI), the language input is fairly intense throughout the core curriculum. In essence, this is similar to immersion approaches in the former colonial context of the British and French empires (*ibid.*). There is another reason why English has taken such a hold in the world, namely, as Graddol puts it (2006: 88–91) "English is not just an educational project, but also a political and economic one", meaning governments in non-English speaking countries strive to linguistically equip their nations in order to be competitive on the global market. Beside the above-mentioned factors, there are other important factors that we need to bear in mind, namely the individual factors (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 28). They include learning style preferences, affective factors, motivation, and learning strategies (*ibid.*).

Problem and aim of the research

The problem has arisen from the following facts: universities in the Republic of Slovenia have been training language teachers for many decades, in the majority of cases, the courses of teaching methodology were offered by departments of philology, faculties of arts and pedagogy, and were intended for teachers-to-be from the fifth grade onwards. This changed dramatically in 2003 with the Bologna Process and the subsequent prolongation of elementary school to nine years (Gaber and Kovač-Šebart, 2008). Parallel to that, experts had suggested introducing FL teaching at an earlier age, starting in the fourth grade. For a period of ten years starting in 2003 teachers who had obtained their BA degree in philology and had received special training in teaching methodology from classes 5 onwards were deemed equipped enough for FL teaching in the fourth grade as well. With the introduction of a foreign language from the second grade onwards in a trial project in 2014, which was later extended to the first grade in the two following years, and consequently, a sudden need for formally trained FL teachers arose who would take up FL teaching in the second grade elementary school onwards. Considering the special circumstances of early language teaching, FL teachers with a BA in philology were no longer qualified for language teaching in classes 1-3, hence the faculties of education in the Republic of Slovenia doubled their efforts in training enough teachers equipped with a course in foreign language methodology at an early age. The trial project of gradual introduction of a FL into the first three years of elementary school officially finished in 2017, the year in which all Slovenian elementary schools were supposed to introduce a FL into their curriculum as of the second grade. Parallel to this effort, faculties of education were trying their best to motivate enough students and would-be teachers, as well as teachers already pursuing their work in schools, to choose a career in FL teaching at an early age. It is our belief that the foreign teachers' prepa-

ration has a certain influence over the learning outcome, which is especially true for the early period, hence it was our aim to investigate the factors that influence in one way or other the attitudes of young learners towards teaching and learning foreign languages. There has already been some quantitative research of the young learners' attitudes towards early FL 1 learning conducted by Smajla (2019).

The author has decided to repeat and expand the research to third and fourth grade pupils in order to test their attitudes towards FL 1 learning, considering the importance of attitudes towards FL learning on the learning outcome. Besides, we are aware of the fact that many previous studies were focused on adult learners, while fewer were applied to school-age children or young adolescents (e.g., Chen, 2009; Hu, Gu, Zhang, & Bai, 2009; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Vrettou, 2011). Although there were some studies that investigated the learning strategies in FL learning among university students (see Vrettou, 2011) based on gender differences (Green & Oxford, 1995; Kaylani, 1996; Psaltou-Joycey & Kantaridou, 2009), few studies tackled gender differences in younger learners (Lan & Oxford, 2003; Lee, 2003). That is precisely the reason why our research focused specifically on gender differences in attitudes towards early FL 1 learning on the one hand and differences based on the grade pupils attend on the other.

Research hypotheses

Based on the previously written premises, two research hypotheses were drawn up:

RH1: Elementary school pupils' attitudes towards the FL 1 learning differ statistically according to gender.

RH2: Elementary school pupils' attitudes towards the FL 1 learning differ statistically according to grade.

Method

A quantitative research paradigm was applied in this study, which employed a survey design in order to measure the students' attitudes and the extent students use ICT for learning English. The paradigm consists of a descriptive and causal-non-experimental method of empirical pedagogical research. Sagadin (1991: 29) described this method as "an investigation of the pedagogical field." To elicit data for the study, the students responded to the following two parts of a questionnaire: 1) general attitudes towards their FL learning (the first 11 items of the research instrument), and 2) their attitude towards the use of ICT in FL 1 learning (the three additional multiple-choice questions).

Data collection and Instruments

A number of state elementary schools were randomly selected from a list of schools provided on the website of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia. All schools received a detailed description of the research, its objectives, and procedures. Printed questionnaires were sent by mail to the selected state elementary schools that had agreed to participate in our research. Each foreign language teacher received printed questionnaires, which were then filled in during the English lessons. There were no specific deadlines for the delivery of the questionnaires. An accompanying disclaimer for parents was sent to the teacher who in turn handed it to the students to take home. Great importance was given to the anonymity and confidentiality of the research. The researcher provided a stamped envelope. The envelope was then sent to the researcher by post.

The research instrument used to measure the attitudes of elementary school children was an AMTB adapted by Gardner (1985). AMTB or Attitude/ Motivation Test Battery was originally developed to test attitudes and motivation for teaching

French as a second language in Canada. The original version of the instrument consisted of 104 items. The respondent then expresses his/her attitude towards an item on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 means that he/she absolutely disagrees and 7 that he/she absolutely agrees. The instrument had already gone through the process of standardisation but was adapted for the purposes of our research. An 11-item instrument that was developed by Smajla for his 2014-2019 research (2019) was reused for the 2020 research. This part of the 2020 Smajla instrument targeted students' attitudes regarding the learning of FL 1, with three additional multiple-choice questions that specifically focused on the students' attitudes towards the use of ICT in FL class. Since the research was aimed at school children in the early cycle of elementary school (second grade children aged 7-8), the instrument underwent a localisation process. The 2020 Smajla instrument underwent the same rigorous validation procedure as the Smajla's 2019 instrument.

Based on the results of the statistical analysis in the 2020 research, the results of the confirmatory factor analysis are as follows: the same 11 items targeting students' general attitudes regarding the FL 1 learning used in the Smajla 2019 research instrument were reused in the 2020 instrument statistical analysis, yet only six items qualified for further analysis due to their skewness and kurtosis values below |2|. Table 1 shows the result of the analyses of the skewness and kurtosis coefficients.

Table 1 shows that due to their values below |2| only six items (printed in bold) meet the criteria for further statistical analysis. The items are as follows: My attitude towards people who speak speaking English is good, English is interesting, I want to learn English, My attitude towards learning English is good, I am not afraid to use English outside of class, and My English class is/my English teacher is good. The above items were then used in the follow-up analyses.

Table 1: Results of the skewness and kurtosis coefficients analysis for the Smajla 2020 research sample

| | I am learning a foreign language in order to be able to communicate with others who use this language | My attitude to people speaking English is good. | English is interesting. | I want to learn English. | My attitude toward the learning of English is good. | I learn a lot during my English class. | Learning English is a good thing. | I am not afraid of using English outside class. | My English class is/my English teacher is good. | I am not afraid of using English during class. | Learning English makes my parents happy. |
|----------|---|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| N | 406 | 405 | 406 | 405 | 405 | 406 | 406 | 405 | 405 | 406 | 406 |
| miss | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| M | 6.34 | 5.25 | 5.74 | 5.67 | 5.68 | 6.17 | 6.45 | 5.30 | 5.96 | 6.14 | 6.67 |
| SD | 1.230 | 1.937 | 1.765 | 1.789 | 1.705 | 1.407 | 1.191 | 2.041 | 1.623 | 1.567 | 0.929 |
| SK | -2.273 | -0.897 | -1.359 | -1.362 | -1.290 | -1.963 | -2.575 | -0.948 | -1.692 | -2.059 | -3.713 |
| SE of SK | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 | 0.121 |
| K | 5.547 | -0.325 | 0.764 | 0.833 | 0.763 | 3.253 | 6.742 | -0.410 | 2.024 | 3.401 | 15.896 |
| SE of K | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 | 0.242 |

Legend: M = mean value; SD = standard deviation; SK =skewness coefficient; SE of SK = standard error of skewness; K = kurtosis coefficient; SE of K = standard error of skewness; miss = missing

The 2020 Smajla research instrument consisting of 11 items was processed in the confirmatory factor analysis. The reliability of the Smajla 2020 research instrument is, based on Ferligoj et al. (1995), very good, since the Cronbach alpha is $\alpha = 0.827$. Based on the results of factor analysis of the 6 items, the values for skewness and kurtosis values met the required criteria, the declared total variance explained is 56.58 % for the first factor, which is a good result. Considering all relevant criteria, the Smajla 2020 instrument is both valid and reliable.

Participants

Invitations were sent out by the author for the cooperation in the research to elementary schools in the Republic of Slovenia by first sending an e-mail to the schools' internet address in January and February of 2020. The invitations included a detailed description of the purpose of the research, objectives, significance of the results and the procedures (delivery of the questionnaire, anonymity of the research procedures, parental consent). Nine state elementary schools initially agreed to participate, but due to the outbreak of the pandemic (pandemic of Sars-CoV-2) in March 2020 and the subsequent closure of in-presence teaching, seven elementary schools participated in the research instead of the initial nine. Thus, a 406- strong sample of elementary school pupils in the 2nd grade (137 or 33.7 % of pupils), 3rd (131 or 32.3 % of pupils) and 4th grades (138 or 34 % of pupils) was formed. See Table 2 for a detailed presentation of the sample.

Table 2: Presentation of the sample based on gender and age

| | M | | | F | | |
|--------|-------|------|------|------|-----|-----|
| Gender | 186 | | | 220 | | |
| | Total | | | 406 | | |
| Age | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| f | 92 | 133 | 131 | 48 | 1 | 1 |
| f% | 22.7 | 32.8 | 32.3 | 11.8 | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Total | | | | 406 | | |

The results presented in Table 2 show that the majority of elementary pupils represented in the sample were 8-year-olds, which would correspond to second grade pupils, followed by 9-year-olds, which would correspond to third graders, followed then by 7-year-olds, which corresponds to first graders. The sample wraps up with 48 fourth graders, with an 11-year-old and a 12-year-old, which could be considered as pupils who very likely needed to retake one or more grades. Male pupils represent 45.8 %, whereas female pupils represent 54.2 % of the sample.

Data analysis

The data were statistically analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency distributions, mean values and crosstabs). The data were processed using SPSS IBM Statistical Package version 26. The frequency distribution of the variables and their parameters were examined, and skewness and kurtosis coefficients were determined. The research hypotheses were tested using a t-test, ANOVA, and the Bonferroni post-hoc test was applied as well.

Results

The following section of the paper contains the presentation of the results of elementary school pupils' attitudes towards the FL 1 learning with regard to the variable gender. The six items, the kurtosis and skewness coefficients' values of which resulted lower than $|2|$, were tested against pupils' gender. See Table 3 below for t-test results.

Table 3: Elementary school pupils' attitudes toward FL learning: the presentation of the results of the t-test

| Item | | Levene's test | P | t-test | df | P |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------|-------|--------|---------|-------|
| English is interesting. | Equal variances assumed | 1.140 | 0.286 | -0.727 | 404 | 0.467 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.723 | 383.464 | 0.470 |
| I want to learn English. | Equal variances assumed | 5.296 | 0.022 | -1.029 | 403 | 0.304 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.018 | 372.178 | 0.309 |
| My attitude toward the learning of English is good. | Equal variances assumed | 0.007 | 0.934 | -1.336 | 403 | 0.182 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.334 | 390.499 | 0.183 |
| Learning English is good thing. | Equal variances assumed | 0.921 | 0.338 | -0.809 | 403 | 0.419 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -0.804 | 380.706 | 0.422 |
| I am not afraid of speaking English outside class. | Equal variances assumed | 0.888 | 0.347 | 1.243 | 403 | 0.215 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 1.238 | 384.985 | 0.217 |
| My English class is/ my English teacher is good. | Equal variances assumed | 7.015 | 0.008 | -1.545 | 403 | 0.123 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -1.521 | 357.606 | 0.129 |

The results shown in Table 3 do not present any statistically significant difference in elementary school pupils' attitudes toward FL 1 learning with regard to their gender, which is in contrast to the findings of the Smajla 2019 research that had proven important differences in pupils' attitudes with regard to their gender. Based on the results of the t-test we cannot accept the RH 1, since no statistically sig-

nificant differences were found in pupils' attitudes with regard to the variable gender.

The follow up reveals the results of the ANOVA with regard to the pupils' attitudes toward FL 1 learning and their grade. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Results of the ANOVA with regard to pupils' attitudes toward FL 1 learning and gender

| Item | | Sum of squares | df | Mean Square | F | P |
|--|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| My attitude to people speaking English is good. | Between Groups | 37.235 | 2 | 18.617 | 5.063 | 0.007 |
| | Within Groups | 1478.074 | 402 | 3.677 | | |
| | Total | 1515.309 | 404 | | | |
| English is interesting. | Between Groups | 41.872 | 2 | 20.936 | 6.916 | 0.001 |
| | Within Groups | 1219.973 | 403 | 3.027 | | |
| | Total | 1261.845 | 405 | | | |
| I want to learn English. | Between Groups | 34.842 | 2 | 17.421 | 5.563 | 0.004 |
| | Within Groups | 1258.822 | 402 | 3.131 | | |
| | Total | 1293.664 | 404 | 0 | | |
| Learning English is a good thing. | Between Groups | 40.476 | 2 | 20.238 | 7.173 | 0.001 |
| | Within Groups | 1134.151 | 402 | 2.821 | | |
| | Total | 1174.627 | 404 | | | |
| I am not afraid of speaking English outside class. | Between Groups | 6.108 | 2 | 3.054 | 0.732 | 0.482 |
| | Within Groups | 1676.742 | 402 | 4.171 | | |
| | Total | 1682.849 | 404 | | | |
| My English class is/ my English teacher is good. | Between Groups | 61.261 | 2 | 30.631 | 12.274 | 0.000 |
| | Within Groups | 1003.183 | 402 | 2.495 | | |
| | Total | 1064.444 | 404 | | | |

Compared to the results of the t-test presented in Table 3, which reveal no statistically significant differences in elementary school pupils' attitudes toward FL 1 learning with regard to gender, the ANOVA results presented in Table 4 offer an entirely different picture. Statistically significant results with alpha values less than 0.05 of confidence are written in bold. It would appear that five items (English is

interesting., $P = 0.007$; I want to learn English., $P = 0.001$; My attitude toward the learning of English is good., $P = 0.004$; Learning English is good thing., $P = 0.001$; and My English class is/my English teacher is good., $P = 0.000$) of the six items tested in the ANOVA have proven to be statistically significant. Such results mean that only in the case of the item "I am not afraid of speaking English outside class." fe-

male and male pupils' attitudes toward FL 1 do not vary.

The following part of the paper focuses on the presentation of the more detailed results of the ANOVA. The Bonferroni post-hoc test revealed the more detailed results of the elementary school pupils' attitudes toward FL 1 learning with regard to the grade they were in and quite a few statistically significant differences were discovered.

With regard to the item "My attitude to people speaking English is good." the fourth graders agreed more with the statement than the second graders ($P = 0.005$).

With regard to the item "English is interesting." the fourth graders agreed more with the statement than the second graders ($P = 0.001$).

With regard to the item "I want to learn English." the fourth graders agreed more with the statement than the second graders ($P = 0.004$).

With regard to the item "Learning English is a good thing." the fourth graders agreed more with the statement than the second graders ($P = 0.001$). The third graders agreed more with the statement than the second graders ($P = 0.045$).

With regard to the item "I am not afraid of speaking English outside class." the post-hoc Bonferroni test did not reveal any statistically significant differences among the second, third, and fourth graders.

As far as the item "My English class is/my English teacher is good." is concerned the third graders agreed more with the statement than the second graders ($P = 0.001$). The fourth graders also agreed more with the statement than the second graders ($P = 0.000$).

Based on the results of the ANOVA and the Bonferroni post-hoc test we can accept the RH 2.

To sum up, the statistical analysis showed significant differences in attitudes among the elementary school pupils toward FL 1 learning at an early age with regard to the grade they are in which most-

ly occurred between fourth and second graders, only with regard to two of the six items the analysis revealed significant differences in attitudes between third graders and the remaining two grades (second and fourth).

Discussion

We have stated at the beginning of the paper that the gradual trial introduction of FL 1 started in the school year 2014 with just one third of all Slovenian state elementary schools. It continued in 2015 with another third and finished in 2016 with the full introduction of FL 1 into the first cycle (grades 1 to 3). We have not addressed teaching methods and approaches in this paper, although they may play an important role in the formation of attitudes towards FL learning at an early age, but rather addressed the issue of gender and grade. It has been years since experts in the field claimed that early exposure is better than a late one, provided that "it is associated with enough significant exposure (other not least important conditions include that exposure to young learners should be intensively distributed, and that learners should be given opportunities to participate in a variety of L2 social contexts)" (Muñoz, 2010: 47). Hence, FL teachers had to bear that in mind and provide for such a learning environment that would cater for enough L2 exposure at the same time providing for the feeling of inclusiveness.

In the same vein, Costa Rigo (2016) discussed the myths and misconceptions of early foreign language teaching and learning, stating the popular belief that younger is better, meaning "that learning a foreign language as a child is easier and more successful and, therefore, advisable" (ibid.: 6). The author further stated, "children develop the ability to use and understand the sounds of language. They are also motivated, have positive attitudes and do not have difficulties with the set of parameters specific to the target language" (ibid.: 11). Smajla obtained similar results in his 2019 research, establish-

ing that attitudes of second grade elementary school pupils toward FL 1 learning and teaching did not differ with regard to age, but rather with regard to gender. Of course, the present study does not focus on the importance of gender, yet the Smajla 2019 research results are important for the perception of the author's 2020 research in the light of a significant change in attitude toward FL 1 learning in the third and fourth grades. Considering the results obtained from the research analyses regarding the variable age, the Smajla 2020 research did not reveal any statistically significant difference in attitudes toward FL 1, which eliminates the age factor in FL 1 learning from those factors that significantly influence the learning outcomes. Significant changes in attitudes occurred with regard to the grade the pupils attended. To clarify, most second grade pupils in Slovenian elementary schools are 7-year-olds, most third grade pupils are eight, and most fourth graders are 9 years of age. Pupils would have been taught by the same FL teacher from the first grade onwards to the third grade, in some cases even until the fifth grade (11- or 12-year-olds). It is then up to the FL teacher's capability to create an encouraging learning environment by applying appropriate teaching methods and approaches. Considering the fact that many of the elementary school pupils engaged in the research were actually taught by the same FL teacher from the first to the third grade, but by a different teacher in the fourth grade, which triggered a significant change in attitudes toward the FL 1 learning from the third grade to the fourth grade, we deem it advisable for FL 1 teachers to adjust their teaching methods and approaches according to the grade the pupils are in or to keep the same FL teacher as in the grades one to three. This inevitably goes hand in hand with the age-appropriate requirements, which means that the earlier the FL 1 is taught, the more teaching approaches and methods a FL teacher needs to be able to handle and, more importantly, use them in a sensible way.

The results also point to an interesting dilemma, namely, considering the fact that the fourth

graders' attitudes differed significantly to those of the second graders and partly to those of the third graders and knowing that in the majority of cases there is also a change in the teacher in the passage from the third to the fourth grade, it would appear advisable to keep the same FL teacher in the period from the first grade to the fourth grade. Namely, FL 1 teachers in the first cycle of elementary schools in Slovenia are in the majority of cases class teachers who have completed additional ESP training. On the other hand, FL teachers from the fourth grade onwards are predominantly specialists who have received classical general training in philology but would not be required to have a special training in early teaching methodology. Teaching a foreign language in childhood thus requires the teacher to master the strategies of the classroom teacher (mastery of classroom dynamics), a great deal of (foreign) language knowledge, mastery of language teaching strategies and knowledge of foreign language learning (Cameron, 2001). The first and the third category is where the class teachers of LSP would have the edge over the specialist teacher of the general philology type, whereas it would appear that the specialist would have the edge over the class teacher with LSP course with regard to the second and fourth category. In an ideal case, the FL 1 teacher at an early age would be a mix of both a class teacher with a LSP course and a specialist teacher, an aim which is hard to achieve.

Conclusion

The paper aimed at establishing the differences in elementary school pupils' attitudes towards FL 1 learning according to their gender and the grade the pupils were in. Based on the results obtained from the quantitative non-experimental research the gender factor in itself does not play a significant role in the underlying research, hence we could not confirm hypothesis 1. Such an outcome came as a surprise. Namely, the outcome of a similar research

conducted by Smajla in 2019 into attitudes of school management teams, FL teachers, and second-grade elementary school pupils, proved that it was the female pupils whose attitudes toward FL 1 learning were more positive than those of their male schoolmates for most of the items. It may appear that the FL 1 teacher's discourse, which might have triggered a difference in attitudes in Smajla's 2019 research, is different this time. Fourth-graders are namely taught by FL teachers who in terms of their basic training have obtained a degree in general philology, lacking a specific LSP training for early language teaching. Concerning the differences in attitudes between the third graders and the second graders, there is another factor that needs to be highlighted, namely the standards of the core curriculum are not assessed in the first grade. The oral and project-based assessments start in the second grade, whereas written assessments begin from the fourth grade onwards, hence assessment factor might be one of the reasons for a difference in attitudes of the third-graders and fourth-graders relative to second-graders.

ers. Though the assessment issue was not the focus of our research in this paper, we certainly acknowledge the importance of assessment and its influence on the formation of attitudes toward FL 1 and suggest that it be investigated thoroughly in the future.

When it comes to how the grade the pupils attend impacted the research, the results indicate many significant differences in attitudes toward FL 1 learning for most of the items, except for the item "I am not afraid of speaking English outside class." Although the age factor was not discussed in the paper, we cannot deny the link between the age of the pupils who participated in our research and the grade they were in, because as the grades progressed, so did their age. The FL 1 teachers should therefore bear in mind the importance of the discourse used in early language teaching, mostly due to the reason that it assumes a more serious tone as the grades progress, which is precisely the reason why more effort should be invested into the gender- and age-appropriate discourse in FL teaching.

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ФАКТОРИ КОЈИ УТИЧУ НА СТАВОВЕ О УЧЕЊУ СТРАНИХ ЈЕЗИКА НА РАНОМ УЗРАСТУ У СЛОВЕНИЈИ

У раду износимо резултате истраживања о ставовима деце према првом страном језику који уче у школи, а у зависности од њиховог узраста и оцена које имају из тог предмета. Проблем у вези са подучавањем страног језика на раном узрасту настао је услед неколико чињеница: иако се наставници страних језика школују на универзитетима у Словенији већ неколико деценија, у већини случајева обука из методике наставе сироводи се на одсецима филолошких, уметничких и педагошких факултета, и то преважно за предавање страних језика узрасту од петог разреда основне школе и надаље. Међутим, од сировођења реформе школства по Болоњи из 2003. године и постепеној увођењу првог страног језика у прва три разреда државне основне школе, многи ученици нижих разреда променили су своје ставове у вези са учењем првог страног језика. У Словенији први страни језик предају наставници страних језика од четвртог разреда и надаље, мада им је дозвољено да предају и у прва три разреда основне школе, али тек пошто стекну поседну диплому из методике наставе на раном узрасту, што може изазвати одређене проблеме код деце у нижим разредима основне школе. То је подстигло ауторку овог рада да прошири истраживање које је сировела у периоду 2014–2019. године о ставовима ученика другог разреда основне школе о учењу првог страног језика и да обухвати и ученике трећег и четвртог разреда. У квантитативном истраживању узорак је чинило 406 ученика другог, трећег и четвртог разреда. Узорковање је извршено пре почетка пандемije вируса корона, од јануара до марта 2020. године, и то је имало озбиљне импликације на величину узорка. Да није избила епидемија и да се нису завориле све педагошке институције, узорак би био много већи. Као истраживачки инструмент коришћен је упитник из Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (АМТВ), који је првобитно објавио Гарднер (Gardner, 1985), а ауторка га прилагодила према своје дисертације. Карактеристике примененог инструмента биле су врло добре, за израчунавање Кронбахов алфа коефицијент вредности је била $\alpha=0.827$. Осим тога, објашњена прва укувна варијанса је 56,58% за први фактор, што је добар резултат. Пославане су две истраживачке хипотезе како би се утврдили ставови ученика нижих разреда основне школе у вези са учењем првог страног језика, а у односу на њихов узраст и оцелу. Резултати показују да нема статистички значајних разлика на петом у односу на оцелу ученика, док су се на АНОВА и Бонферони пост-хок тестовима показале статистички значајне корелације у односу на варијаблу оцелу из предмета и утврђено је да се ставови ученика четвртог и делимично трећег разреда значајно разликују од ставова ученика другог разреда у оцелу већине предмета на петом. Усмено оцењивање и оцењивање засновано на пројектима почиње од другог разреда, а писмено оцењивање уводи се од четвртог разреда. Стога, један од разлога зашто се ставови ученика трећег и четвртог разреда разликују од ставова ученика другог разреда може бити оцењивање, али се тим питањем

у овом раду не давимо. Нешићо друћо је бићно истићи: наиме, у четвртном разреду сћрани језик ћредају настћавници који на сћудијама филолоћије нису имали ћоседну методичку обуку за ћодучавање сћраноћ језика на раном узрасћу. Дискурс настћавника у основној школи који су ћрошли обуку за ћодучавање сћраноћ језика на раном узрасћу може бићи узрок различитћих сћавова ученика. Закључак је да одћоварајућа обука настћавника ћрема узрасћу и разреду који ученици ћохаћу сићурно ћредсћавља значајан факћор, ако имамо у виду различитће врсће обуке коју су имали настћавници који ћредају у ћрва ћри разреда државне основне школе у Словенији.

Кључне речи: ученици у нижим разредима основне школе, енћлески језик сћруке (ESP), учење сћраних језика, филолоћија, државне основне школе.