Pre-primary EFL teaching a review of literature

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ZAVRŠNI RAD

PRE-PRIMARY EFL TEACHING – A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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TEMA ZAVRŠNOG RADA: PRE-PRIMARY EFL TEACHING – A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

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SUMMARY

European Commission has recognized pre-primary English foreign language learning and preschool education in general as the object of increased attention with the aim to fulfil children's potential (European Commission, 2011). This potential refers to children's personal development, but also development of global society in terms of cultural awareness, social skills and professional mobility. As English language has become an unofficial language for global communication, starting to learn it early and on a high quality level has become a global interest.

This thesis deals with English foreign language teaching to pre-primary children, a relatively new practice that has become one of the more prominent global trends. The author suggests the reasons behind such a trend, and outlines the beneficial outcomes early English foreign language learning can have provided the right circumstances are met. The thesis will also point out factors that dictate benefits or drawbacks and difficulties when teaching and learning a language, such as teacher education, children's age, social, and provision factors. The thesis will present methods and activities recommended or proven as having positive outcomes in language learning, as well as those that are used more regularly with pre-primary children.

Key words: pre-primary, EFL teaching, teaching methods, EFL activities, teacher education.

SAŽETAK

Europska komisija prepoznala je učenje engleskog jezika tijekom predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja, i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje sam kao interesno područje s ciljem da se ispuni dječji potencijal. To se odnosi na osobni dječji razvoj, ali i na razvoj potencijala sveukupnog društva u smislu kulturološke osviještenosti, socijalnih vještina i profesionalne mobilnosti. Engleski je jezik postao neslužbeni jezik globalne komunikacije, pa je učenje istog od rane dobi i na visokokvalitetan način postalo područje globalnog interesa.

Ovim radom obuhvaća se problematika poučavanja engleskog jezika tijekom predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja kao relativno nova praksa koja je postala jedan od prominentnijih globalnih trendova. Autorica navodi neke od razloga koji su doveli do pojave navedenog trenda i ističe moguće povoljne ishode učenja engleskog jezika tijekom predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja koji su ostvarivi uz odgovarajuće okolnosti. U radu će također biti spomenuti čimbenici koji utječu na koristi, nedostatke i poteškoće koje se mogu pojaviti tijekom poučavanja ili učenja, kao što su obrazovanje odgajatelja i profesora, dječja dob, mogućnosti i odredbe i socijalni čimbenici. Predstavit će se i metode i aktivnosti koje su pokazale pozitivne rezultate u učenju jezika, kao i one koje se često koriste u radu s predškolskom djecom.

Ključne riječi: poučavanje engleskoga jezika, predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje, metode i aktivnosti, obrazovanje učitelja.

1. INTRODUCTION – Early English as a foreign language learning

Early foreign language learning has become increasingly popular over the last few decades, with many countries implementing compulsory foreign language courses from a young age. In Europe, Eurydice report (European Commission, 2017) shows a drastic decrease in the starting age for compulsory first foreign language learning. Up to 2016, that age was nine to eleven years old, but since then it has shifted back and now most European countries implement compulsory foreign language learning at the beginning of primary education, that being before the age of eight. There are a few countries, such as Cyprus and Poland, where compulsory foreign language learning is implemented for children under the age of six, during pre-primary education, as a way of preparing them for structured language learning during primary school and later on in life (European Commission, 2017). Research on the rest of the world also reports a growing number of very early foreign language learning trends, with the starting age being six or younger.

However, while many countries have not yet implemented compulsory foreign language learning in pre-primary education, there has been a rising demand for it, and many pre-schools now offer pre-primary foreign language learning programmes. Substantial demand for early language learning comes from parents who have realised that the acquisition of languages other than mother tongue is an asset for children's future social and working lives. The ability to competently function and interact in a multilingual and multicultural world is one of the many benefits early language learning can have for children, as stated by the European Commission. Early language learning encourages children's individual and social development, teaches empathy and cultural sensitivity, enhances comprehension, expression, communication, problem-solving, concentration, and as a result, strengthens self-confidence. Based on these aims of early language learning, the European Commission has made a recommendation for early childhood education to pursue the following goals – to support intercultural education, to foster the personal development of the child, to ensure consistency with a lifelong learning perspective, and to introduce the same second/foreign language which will be learnt in primary school where appropriate (European Commission, 2011). "Pre-primary language education aims to offer all children equal opportunities for a good start to the

emotional, social and cognitive development resulting from language exposure, taking into account their needs and interests and preparing them for primary school" (European Commission, 2011, p. 10).

However, there has been much debate on how early the learning of a foreign language should start. On the one hand, research has shown possible similarities between first language (mother tongue) acquisition and foreign language acquisition in young learners (given the right circumstances). This happens between the ages of approximately two and four, during the phase of "natural" language acquisition, when the child's capacity for learning is neurologically different than an adult's. This approach is based on the "critical period hypothesis" which proposes that young children have an intuitive capacity for languages, and are more able to acquire native-like levels of competence, especially in speaking – pronunciation and intonation. It also proposes that the mentioned ability begins to decline during puberty. On the other hand, older learners have already developed learning strategies, they are more experienced in communication and discourse, they are able to "dissect" language and think in and about language terms (such as "grammar", "tense", ...), and they may have a clearer image of why they are learning a language (Johnstone, 2002).

> Overall, an advantage of an early start is that in principle at least it allows young beginners to exploit such advantages as they possess, but in addition, as they become older, to make use of the advantages that older learners possess. So, over time, both sets of advantages are available to those making the early start, whereas only the second set of advantages is available to those beginning later. (Enever, 2015, p. 18)

Very frequently, the language chosen for early language learning is English. One of the reasons for it being English could be that the English language has gradually become an unofficial lingua franca (Seidlhofer, 2011), as it is the language with the most second language speakers in the world (see Figure 1). It is used globally and as the language of international communications. Other reasons include emigration to English-speaking countries, business brands such as McDonald's going global and targeting young children, the popularity of English language music industry, TV programmes, films, and other elements of pop-culture. It is also a predominantly used language in Internet communication (see Figure 2), which can be interpreted as

a vastly intercultural medium for communicating, learning, and interacting (Taylor, 2012).

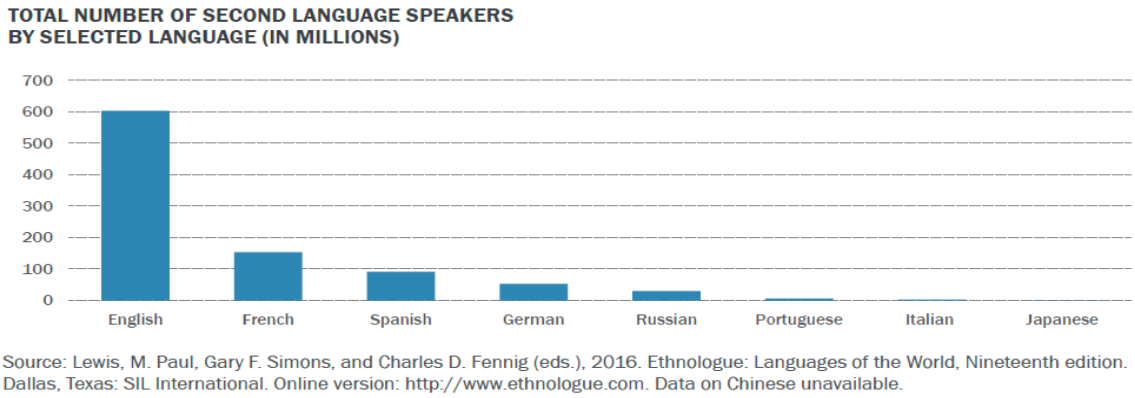


Figure 1. A visual representation of second language speakers by language (International Association of Language Centres, 2016)

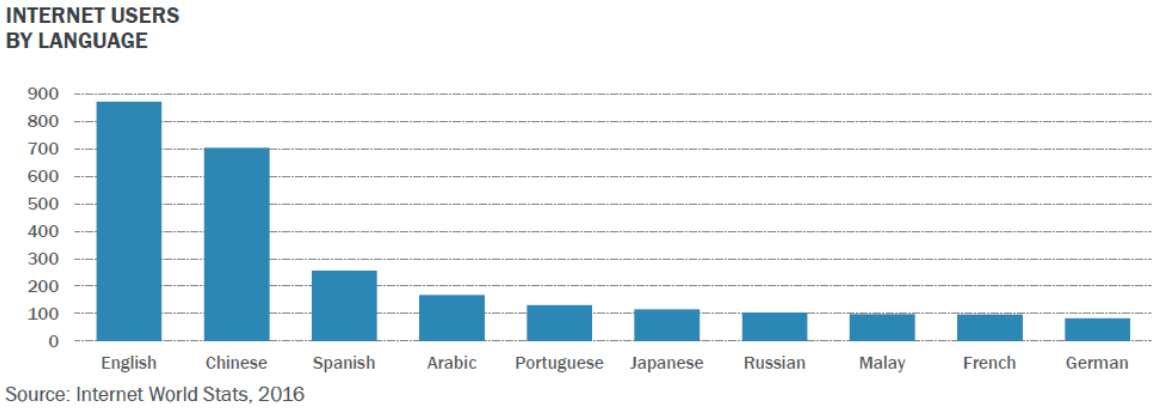


Figure 2. A visual representation of language speakers using the Internet (International Association of Language Centres, 2016)

In the following chapter some benefits and drawbacks of pre-primary EFL teaching will be presented. Next, the issue of still rather undefined pre-primary EFL teacher education will be discussed. The last two chapters will present some of the more prominent EFL teaching models, methodology, and activities.

2. PRE-PRIMARY ENGLISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING – Benefits and drawbacks

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, learner's age has an impact on language learning. The term pre-primary aged children refers to the children between three to seven years of age. That age comes with certain advantages, but also disadvantages, not only with reference to learning languages, but also when children's overall learning and development are observed. Very young children are psychologically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially very receptive – which can be an asset, but is also a big responsibility. Younger children are at a stage in their development when they are open to new phenomena, and the motivation to learn is very high, which, when applied to language learning, results in them enjoying learning a new language. As they are in the phase of "natural" language acquisition, they have a potential to achieve a high level of pronunciation, intonation, and language rhythm.

> Young children's second/foreign language acquisition is similar in many ways to the acquisition of their first language/mother tongue, which is natural and effortless. Experts agree that there is a 'critical period' for developing one's first language/mother tongue, beyond which it is less likely to occur with ease. The same tends to apply in the case of second/foreign language learning. An early start is therefore essential to gain native-speaker levels of competence, particularly in pronunciation and intonation. (European Commission, 2011, p. 7)

Being in their early stages of social development, they are less self-conscious than older learners so they are more likely to use language more frequently and confidently, first by imitating and repeating, and later on by building on their existing knowledge and rearranging it, using language creatively. Pre-primary aged children have a natural "thirst for knowledge", they are eager, spontaneous, curious, inquisitive, they learn by asking questions, and they are persistent – all of which is a great asset for language learning (European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, 2019).

According to Taylor (2012), when acquiring the second language (sequential language, and in this case a foreign language) learners apply what they have learned to their existing knowledge in three general steps: Exploration, Go for it, and Proficiency. Step one, "Exploration", describes a period when the young learner uses non-verbal communication, guessing and situational assessment. During this period motivation plays a very important role. Step two, "Go for it", describes a period

when the young learner has acquired enough of the second language to be able to communicate and construct short sentences. During this period the motivation to communicate is more important than grammar or syntax, and exposure to the second language is crucial. Step three, "Proficiency", describes a period when young learners acquire new vocabulary, grammar rules, and start using the second language. During this period, using the second language more frequently and in different situations is very important. While these three steps seem rather straightforward, very young learners will have difficulties and will make similar mistakes such as a quiet beginning, combining languages, applying first language rules to the second language, and in some extreme cases, loss of the first language (Taylor, 2012).

Apart from the mentioned, very young learners also have some difficulties when learning a new language – their short attention span, sometimes a lacking ability to concentrate, a lower level of long-term memory retention, no analytical approach to language, no learning strategies (they have to learn how to learn while learning a language), their level of emotional development, and many more make learning and teaching a complex and demanding task. These are all factors that early childhood educators and language teachers should have in mind, because they are a crucial component in making a difference in child's motivation, language learning, and further development.

While being one of the major factors in early language learning, learner's age is not the only one. Johnstone (2002) emphasizes, apart from age, social factors, and provision factors – policy and time. Social factors are the dominance of English as a foreign language (Figure 1), the need of English native-speakers for other languages, and the threat to "minority" heritage and community languages groups. Enever (2015) also emphasizes similar factors, grouping socio-political factors, and conditions as a factor. Both authors position English centrally as a global language in the socio-political context, noting parents and politicians as influencers in promoting benefits of an early language learning start. Learning English from an early age could lead to global interconnectivity, with learners – future fluent adult citizens equipped to operate in the global marketplace (Enever, 2015; Johnstone, 2002).

Johnstone (2002) describes provision factors as ensuring an explicit, long-term policy, and sufficient time in the curriculum. The long-term policy should deal with

factors such as early to lifelong learning, with an emphasis on continuity, teacher supply, initial education and continuing professional development, aims, guidelines, approaches and materials, diversification of language learning, systems for monitoring and evaluation, and incorporation of insights from practitioner and other research (Johnstone, 2002). This however is yet to be achieved on a global, or even European scale.

Enever (2015) claims that it is nearly impossible to identify any single factor that can be seen as a disadvantage of an early start in learning under any circumstance, and emphasizes conditions necessary for generalized success – teacher expertise, sustaining motivation over time, and continuity that lead to establishing aims and accomplishing goals.

The reason these factors have a tremendous impact on language learning is that each individual child is different. Every child has their own abilities, skill levels, interests, and with it a potentially fluctuating motivation – what "works" for one child might be deteriorating to another. Beneficial higher outcome predictions and early start advantages that learners might experience are unlikely to happen without continual language learning through pre-primary and schooling period (Enever, 2015). It is an issue that has not yet been organized on a higher scale – in the majority of European countries pre-primary English learning, while recommended, is still an extra-curricular activity that parents can choose. Pre-primary English is very frequently taught in just a few 45-minute to one-hour long sessions, one to three times a week, usually using methodology more suitable for older learners and school environment. It is not compulsory, and children (and their parents) have the right to drop out. Sustaining motivation is a challenging task in that it declines as the challenges of learning increase, and it is a narrow space in balancing enjoyment with cognitive engagement. Some evidence shows that children's motivation is correlated to a positive emotional connection with the teacher. Teacher skills, given the right circumstance, play a deciding role, as teachers are the ones responsible for organizing environment and activities, providing resources, moderating, and communication, and as a result influencing children's motivation. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on English foreign language teacher education and the issues regarding teacher education for pre-primary EFL learners.

3. EFL TEACHER EDUCATION

EFL stands for English foreign language, and English foreign language teaching refers to teaching English as a second or third (and so on) language, where English is not the native language of the learner, nor is it the native language of the country where English is being taught. For example, a Croatian learning English in Croatia is an EFL learner, whereas a Croatian learning English in the UK is not. EFL usually implies a non-native English teacher, and a non-native English learner. In that sense, and because young learners are highly dependent on the teacher, proper and continual teacher education is of paramount importance (Bland, 2015).

While being one of the most essential conditions for good teaching practice, education of EFL teachers rarely qualifies them for working in the pre-primary age spectrum (ages 3-7). Namely, most EFL teacher education programmes focus on the primary and secondary level, while pre-primary level is underrepresented. In addition, experts claim that the needed qualifications for pre-primary level have yet to be determined formally.

"Greater interest in early language learning at pre-primary level has naturally created a new demand for qualified English teachers but the recommended qualifications and competences are difficult to ascertain" (Mourão, 2015, p. 53). Because of that, understanding of needed methodological skills for teaching young learners varies considerably, and as a result some countries prepare language teachers for teaching across the whole age range, with little consideration to specialist skills needed for teaching young and very young learners (Enever, 2015). Most of the time, pre-primary English teachers are external language tutors, not permanent members of staff, and many do not have a basic qualification other than a school-leaving examination in the language, while qualified and more experienced teachers are teaching older learners (upper primary) (Mourão, 2015).

Nonetheless, studies have been conducted and attempts have been made to propose formal teaching methodology for pre-primary English teachers and pre-primary teacher education curriculum, such as Černá's research leading to the National Plan - a document that provided guidelines for the formal pre-primary English teaching curriculum in the Czech Republic, but with little impact.

> The guidelines stipulate that ECEC foreign language education is conceived as a preparatory phase preceding formal primary education, that it offers a foundation for learning foreign languages, that teachers should be trained specifically to teach foreign languages to pre-primary ages children and that relevant teaching materials and resources, as well as appropriate curriculum time for learning foreign languages (English), should be available. (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016, p. 69)

While there is no globally accepted document, some recommendations have been implemented into practice. The majority of Europe now requires pre-primary EFL teachers to have a minimum of B2 English level, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) standard, meaning that they have an upper-intermediate level of English skills. This has however resulted in teachers who were educated to be pre-primary educators, and have later passed the B2 skill level test. As guidelines, the European Centre for Modern Languages, a Council of Europe institution, provided pre-primary educators with a portfolio that can help them in their professional development, reflexion, self-assessment, and achieving professional skills (and later expanding and perfecting) - knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to work with pre-primary aged children (see Figure 3).

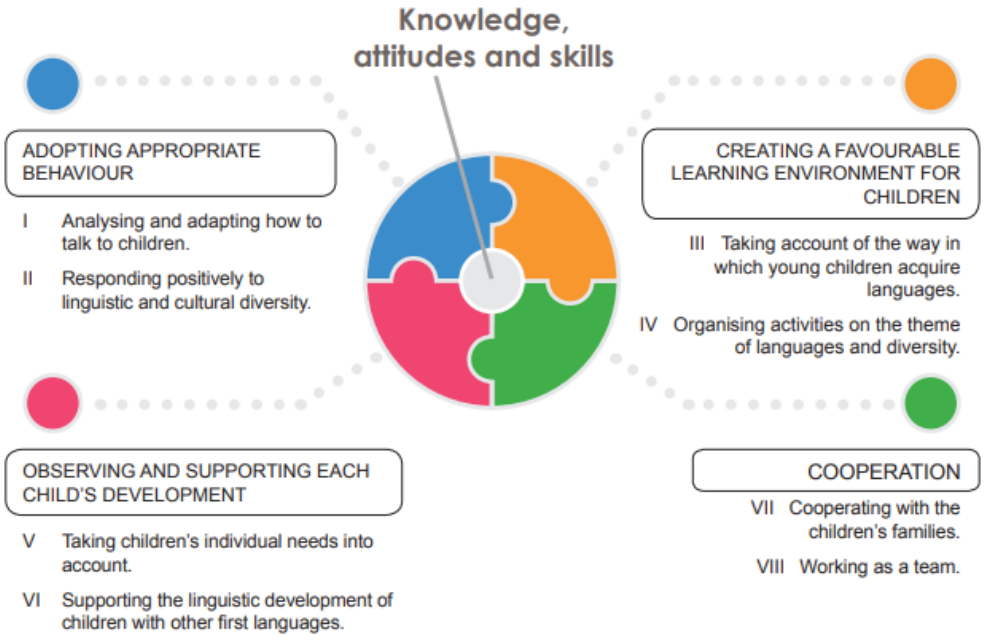


Figure 3. The professional skills associated with children's linguistic and cultural development (Carré-Karlinger, Goulier, Orlova & Roussi, 2015, p. 8)

EFL teachers working in a pre-primary setting should both be qualified in pedagogical and methodological skills as well as language skills. They should be able to organize, manage and provide a motivating classroom atmosphere,

communicate well with the learners using both verbal and non-verbal cues and messages, and have a nurturing, understanding and respectful relationship with children, other teachers, educators, and parents. They should also be fluent and flexible enough to be able to spontaneously choose the appropriate and understandable language for the specific age group, but also for individual class and child's interest and level of understanding, both when speaking, and when choosing materials (Figure 3) (Carré-Karlinger et al., 2015).

4. PRE-PRIMARY EFL TEACHING

> The research on the benefits of an early start in foreign language learning is not particularly encouraging as findings over a long period of time suggest that when the foreign language learning is restricted to the classroom there are few, if any, long term gains from starting foreign language learning at a very young age. (Robinson, Mourão, Kang, 2015, p. 5)

However, starting language learning early implies longer language exposure which can lead to better results in language learning and developing capacity to learn languages through life (European Commission, 2011). Introducing a new language from an early age can have positive outcomes later on in language learning if learning a language in early childhood (pre-primary) is organised in such a way that it is integrated into the child's holistic education.

> Language-learning activities should be adapted to the age of the learners and to the pre-primary context. Children should be exposed to the target language in a meaningful and, if possible, authentic settings, in such a way that the language is spontaneously acquired rather than consciously learnt. (Mourão, 2015, p. 55)

Pre-primary language teaching, or rather education, considers and acts on children's needs and interests while preparing them for obligatory primary school: it offers equal opportunities for every child, taking into account their individuality, trying to provide a basis for emotional, social and cognitive development through language exposure. Teaching language in a pre-primary setting needs to be child-oriented, with plenty of opportunities for children to learn naturally during free-play and while interacting with teacher facilitated opportunities, but it can and should also have teacher-led moments and activities during a pre-set "English time" (daily or weekly English sessions), in other words, explicit learning/teaching moments. It should be integrated into the child's daily classroom routines so that a child has more exposure to the language, and EFL classrooms should be equipped with areas where children can engage in free play in English language. Child motivation, frequency and consistency of using language, as well as a holistic approach to language teaching, play an important part in language acquisition of young learners, and influence one another. Considering the very young learners' age, much like learning any new skill

or gaining knowledge in non-language related circumstances, some of their abilities are very significant in choosing methods and activities:

> their pleasure in rhythm, their curiosity and interest in technology, their excitement over picturebooks, the interest in others and intercultural mediation, children's interest in collecting and portfolios, the connection of drama to play and also task-based learning, Content and Language Integrated Learning and immersion approaches that meet children's need to learn implicitly. (Bland, 2015, p. 4)

As a way of encouraging holistic and natural language learning, various authors recommend many methods and activities that have linguistic/language goals, but also educational goals – that teach "for life through language".

4.1. Formats, Encounter, Engage and Exploit model, and the Play Spiral

Before being able to define and explain "Encounter, Engage and Exploit" model of English foreign language teaching, it is advisable to mention and explain formats in language teaching and learning. Bruner defined formats as a routined and repeated interaction in which adults and children do things together using language. Formats are occasions when during routine activities children have an opportunity to use language systematically. They are composed of three essential components that are: a sequential structure and a set of realisation rules, clearly marked turn-taking roles, and a script-like quality. An example of format in language teaching is a "Hello routine", the one described being a transcript of an activity where twenty-five Portuguese children, aged five to six years old participated:

> Teacher: [To Filipa] It's your turn today!
> Filipa: [Gets up, looks in the English box and finds the Hoola; she places it on her hand, and looks at the class] Hello, good morning.
> Class: Good morning.
> Filipa: How are you?
> Class: I'm fine thank you. What's the weather like today, Hoola?
> Filipa: [Looks out the window] It's cloudy. (Mourão, 2015, p. 60)

This routine follows all three components of a format. Firstly, the child (Filipa) followed a sequential structure by finding the English puppet (Hoola), greeting her classmates, asking questions, and answering questions represent a sequence that was introduced by the English teacher, and that had been repeated throughout English lessons without change apart from the weather vocabulary. Secondly, the activity had

clearly marked "turn-taking roles" – the teacher who indicates who holds the puppet, the child holding the puppet, and the rest of the class. Thirdly, the activity had a script-like quality – an exchange comprised of just a few sentences ("Hello, good morning.", "Good morning.", "How are you?", "I'm fine thank you.", "What's the weather like today, Hoola?", "It's [weather].") that children are able to confidently use without teachers' help (Mourão, 2015). These sentences are also formulaic language, an easily memorisable and recognizable string of words that form a meaning in one's mental lexicon (Wray, 2008).

Formats in language teaching is an underlying principle needed for understanding the "Encounter, Engage, and Exploit" (EEE) model. This model of teaching English to pre-primary children is similar to the "Presentation, Practice, and Production" (PPP) model of teaching English to older learners (primary learners, adults), the only difference being that it is child-oriented (while the PPP model is teacher-oriented). It is comprised of three steps – Encounter, Engage, and Exploit. During the first step, the teacher introduces children to new language by giving an understandable input in an interesting way. Activities during this step are teacher-led and controlled, and use a lot of repetition. In that way, children encounter words and phrases in a, for them, fun activity, using all of their senses and body, and form understandings of words to be able to put language into context. During the second step, Engage, teacher scaffolds children and provides them with support through controlled or guided engagement. Controlled engagement focuses on accuracy, while guided engagement focuses on fluency and meaning. During this step, children engage with the language, often through repetitive games and tasks, and become responsible for remembering the language. During the third step, Exploit, children exploit language for their own pleasure and use it for their free-play activities, and with a purpose to communicate, often in pair and group games (Robinson, Mourão & Kang, 2015). "Play is one of the most important ways in which young children gain essential knowledge and skills. For this reason, play opportunities and environments that promote play, exploration and hands-on learning are at the core of effective pre-primary programmes" (UNICEF, 2018, p 7). The need to play is in the nature of each child because it allows the child to create imaginary situations, act out roles, and follow rules determined by those roles, in that way reliving real experiences (Mourão, 2104). It is essential for children to process new knowledge to which they have been exposed, to rearrange it, to comprehend it, confidently use it, and through it, gain new

knowledge. It is considered children's work. Through play, children "make sense" of the world. It is an activity that is meaningful, joyful, actively engaging, iterative, and socially interactive, and can occur in many forms. Some of the forms being: play with objects, imaginary play, play with peers, and with adults, solitary play, cooperative play, associative play, physical play, and many more. In the context of language learning and the "Encounter, Engage, Exploit" model, two general types of play are very important – child-initiated (and child-led) play or activity, and teacher/adult-initiated (and –led) play or activity. In pre-primary settings, the role of the teacher is to provide and scaffold playful experiences to encourage learning (UNICEF, 2018). Much like building up children's abilities and self-confidence in language using the "Encounter, Engage, Exploit" model for activities, the same basic principle is applied when organising activity flow throughout a designated amount of time (during language learning in pre-primary) using an adapted "The Play Spiral" (see Figure 4). The principle is as follows – children need both teacher-led and child-led activities (child-initiated or teacher-initiated play). The Play Spiral begins with a teacher-led activity, one in which the teacher directly instructs and controls play, preferably using the EEE model. This exposes children to the language they need to be able to participate in a future activity. The next stage is a child-initiated play activity, when children freely interact with resources and other children using language learnt during the first stage (or earlier stages). Children tend to re-enact routines they have experienced during the first stage, further reinforcing language acquisition. The next step is again a teacher-led activity in which the teacher provides children with opportunities to reinforce their prior learning, and presents new knowledge. At subsequent stages, given there was enough mobility from teacher-led to child-led activities, children become more and more confident in using target language (English) while engaging in free play. As the spiral expands, children become more familiar with the language and are able to naturally recognize underlying patterns and concepts of the language, which then enables them to add on and restructure their knowledge. This lasts until a new learning experience is acquired. The term "accretion" is used to emphasize the ever-expanding spectrum of cognitive and linguistic knowledge and skills that enable children to use the target language automatically and appropriately, up until the point when they become fluent. However, for children to be able to engage in child-led free-play in the target language, there needs to be a designated area with materials and resources that will

stimulate it (Robinson, Mourão & Kang, 2015). This requires deliberate and meticulous planning, but also spontaneous interactions building on children's interests and ideas (UNICEF, 2018).

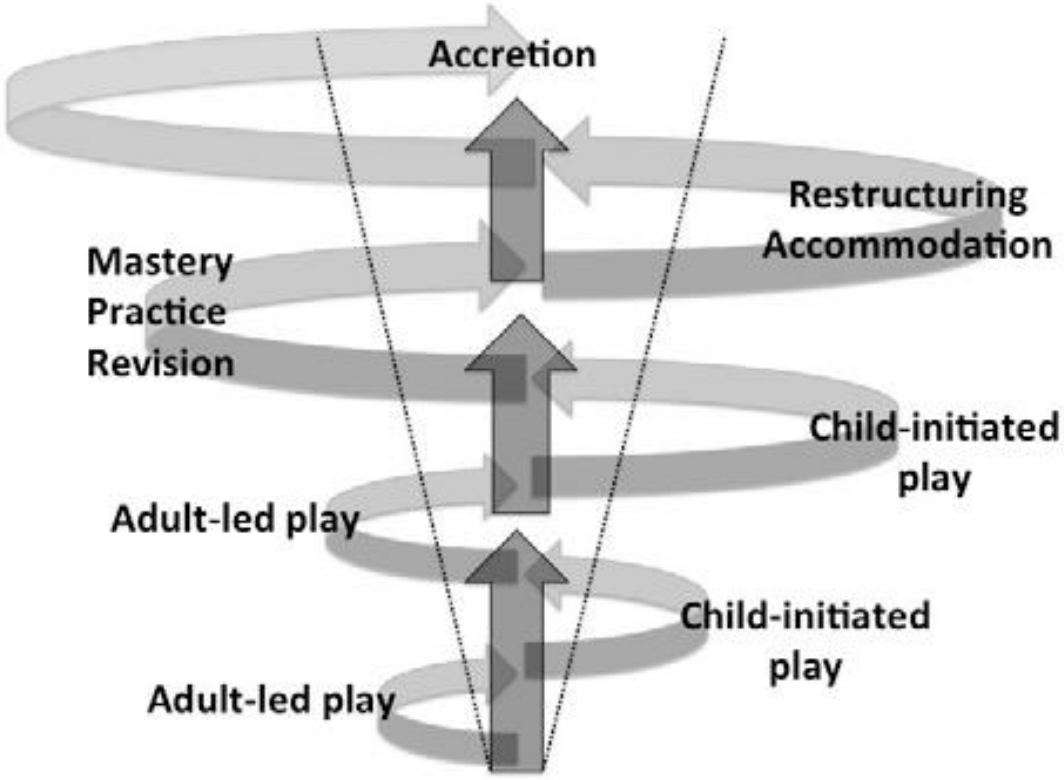


Figure 4. The Play Spiral, adapted by Mourão (2014) (Robinson, Mourão & Kang, 2015, p. 13)

4.2. English learning area – ELA

As an opportunity for children to engage in child-led English activities and interact using English to enforce "The Play Spiral" model, the teachers can, alongside other learning areas in a classroom, provide children with an area dedicated to English. "The approach incorporates teacher-led activity and teacher facilitated opportunity for children's experimental and creative use of English in a specially resourced English Learning Area (ELA) within the classroom" (Robinson, Mourão & Kang, 2015, p. 3).

English Learning Area is a physical area of the room (see Figure 5) in which children spend their time during pre-school that provides access to English outside lessons, but also helps integrate the language into the children's day (Mourão, 2104). It is equipped with English resources that may vary from very explicitly English materials such as flashcards with English words, to relatively unrelated materials such as props and puppets that are related to a story or song that children have heard in English. Other materials that can and should be offered in an English learning area can be different picturebooks, storybooks, story cards, board games in English, worksheets that children can freely use, tape-scripts in English, signs, posters, or even clothes to encourage role-play. The resources with which children engage and which children use have to be long lasting, emphasizing here quality, and can be bought or made, either teacher- or child-made. Child-made materials are especially beneficial because the process of making them can be seen as a language activity that consequently leads to children being emotionally more inclined to playing with it and using the language that was used in the process. This can also be beneficial because it might result in children making their own materials during free-play. The resources and materials should replicate English sessions so that the children are familiar with them and feel confident in using language while playing, and they have to be attractive to children. This area enables children to use English language more frequently and spontaneously during their free-play and to be creative and experiment with the language in a safe environment (Robinson, Mourão & Kang, 2015).

Figure 5. ELA - English Learning Area (Robinson, Mourão & Kang, 2015, p. 27)

4.3. Content and Language Integrated Learning – CLIL

Content and Language Integrated Learning model of language learning is a trend that emerged in the 1990s, and has since then been proven to have positive outcomes in language use and proficiency later in learner's life. It has developed as a result of widespread introduction of foreign language learning in mainstream education and the recognition of the necessity to focus on meaning alongside form to achieve better integration of those speaking different languages (Marsh, 2002).

It is a term which refers to "any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content" (Marsh, 2002, p. 15). CLIL is an approach that focuses on integrating foreign language and subject content across different learning and teaching contexts (Marsh, 2002). Some of CLIL's potentials for improving the quality of foreign language teaching, according to Muñoz (2002) are: CLIL uses foreign language as a medium of instruction and communication that makes the teacher aware of learners' language abilities and needs, the need for consistent comprehension checks increases the level of teacher-learner and learner-learner communication and by that CLIL stimulates implicit and incidental learning, and fluency; it encourages and makes learners widen their language potential and produce meaningful language. The method makes the teacher aware of the need of support; visual and/or other types of cognitive and interactional support that (especially young learners) require. The quality of foreign language teaching using CLIL method is also reinforced by the implementation of team-work and tandem teaching, which require reflection on and elaboration of teaching practices (Muñoz, 2002) – which in turn produce a higher quality teaching practice in the next "step". Muñoz (2002) also lists some of CLIL's potential for increasing the number of successful FL learners/speakers, and they are as follows: higher quality teaching (as listed earlier) benefits learners by having a meaningful and understandable input for which CLIL prepares learners – it increases their ability to process input, making them more prepared for higher-level thinking skills, and it enhances cognitive development. During CLIL, learning takes place in a relatively anxiety-free environment, so it has a lower emotional impact on the learner. That, among other factors, can positively influence motivation, and learners (children) are

usually highly motivated to learn the content, which when learned through foreign language fosters and sustains motivation to learn the language itself (Muñoz, 2002).

On a European scale, it has been widely accepted and used. One of the examples of good CLIL practice is the one in Spain, which implemented the method in the 2003/2004 academic year and has been using it to present day. The aims of using the method were the implementation of the English language from the age of three in a way that children learn both content and language at the same time in a cooperative way, and to make them realise the application of the learnt in life. To accomplish those aims, English was used on a daily basis as a way of communication, and during integrated and holistic project of a wide variety, all the while promoting autonomous and active learning. The teachers who were involved used methods such as assemblies, supervised group work, phonics work, research, and activities based on children's prior knowledge, sensorial activities, resources, materials and information about the topic that has been negotiated with children (or based on their interests), and classroom displays for each project. However, not all learning is done in the classroom. Cooperation with parents and community is recommended, and has been used. Children and parents searched for information at home, families were involved in classroom activities, and trips and visits to places related to the topics were organised so that the children realise the application of gained knowledge to real life.

Such model in Spain, for children, resulted in high motivation, the perception of the importance of cooperation, developing creativity, natural way of language learning, perception of authenticity and practical use of language being learnt. Also, the involvement of families has been perceived as beneficial. However, the downside of such a model is that the teachers do not have enough time in their schedules to prepare materials and resources needed, and the funds provided by Local Administration or by winning prizes was, more often than not, insufficient. While having some prominent downsides, the model was still perceived as one having highly successful outcome potential, and has been used since its implementation (Álvarez-Cofiño Martínez, n.d.). De Bot (2002) also reports good outcomes when using CLIL model in the Netherlands – research evaluating the outcomes shows that the students in the bilingual streams reach higher levels of proficiency in English than the rest of the students, without any negative effects on their mother tongue or other school subjects (de Bot, 2002).

5. TEACHING METHODOLOGY AND ACTIVITIES

While being some of the many recommended models for teaching foreign languages to young learners, the above mentioned are a generalized set of guidelines on how teaching and learning of a foreign language should be organized in order for learners to achieve a higher level of perceived success. The more in-depth approach when planning (firstly teacher-led) activities with very young learners places the focus on the following questions – who, what, where, when, how, and why. Each of these words represents one or more factors that have to be considered when teaching, both young and any other learners, as they influence one another.

The question "Who?" refers to the learners – their age, level, interests, needs, competences and every other aspect of their characteristics. Young learners are highly motivated to learn, but have a very concrete and literal way of thinking, they need activities that, apart from challenging them cognitively, activate all of their senses so that they can learn by seeing, touching, hearing, tasting, smelling, watching, moving, and exploring. Very young learners may still be in the phase of egocentrism, so they need encouragement to start socializing. They may prefer to play on their own, and later may be too shy to approach other children to play, and when challenged with a strong emotion, may lash out due to their low level of self-control, so they need activities that will teach them empathy, friendship, acceptable behavioural patterns, and social skills. Important question to consider when planning is related to their interests. Different children, and groups of children might have completely different interests, but knowing them, a creative teacher can use those as a way of motivation and teaching unrelated topics through it in a considerably different way with the same general results (Hastings, 2014). "What?" refers to the topic of the lesson, materials, the nature of it – is it vocabulary, song, rhyme, story, or grammar? Every type of new knowledge might dictate a different approach when teaching. "Where?" refers to the physical environment in which teaching takes place, but also to the overall atmosphere in that space. With young learners especially, it also refers to the imaginary environment, a place where a story takes place. For young learners it should be a fun and happy place where they feel safe and confident, and a place that offers plenty of opportunities for interaction with the teacher and with friends. A learner-friendly environment has a number of different small areas

and “centres” in which children can write, draw, play, experiment, and interact, divided by furniture or materials to form a flowing and clean layout. The space should be clean, fun, creative, inviting and motivating, and should be arranged in a way that encourages exploration, interest, and spontaneous child-led activity with materials and resources in a place where children can easily find and use them. That can be easily achieved with constant creative changes and variations. However, the space should not be cluttered because very young learners have a shorter attention span and lower ability to concentrate, and a cluttered space could be a distraction (Taylor, 2012). “When?” refers to time. The time of day, month or the year when the lesson takes place, but also the time in a child’s day – if they are rested, hungry, if they have played, and so on, and the time in a child’s life – if something significant is happening at that time in pre-school, at home, in their city, country, or the world. The question also refers to the time in the material that is being taught. “How?” refers to materials and methods physically, and also to their emotional impact on both the teacher and the learners. This question is heavily influenced by all of the questions above. The last question, “Why?”, refers to the aims and goals of the taught material. Those aims and goals consider both language and life, as a way of integrating language in a learner’s daily life. Once all of the questions above are answered, the teacher has all of the information needed to prepare a high quality lesson and environment, and can consecutively and continually organise activities that will be interesting, educational, and integrated into the learner’s holistic development.

5.1. Stories – oral, written, picture-books

Oral storytelling has been present for more than a few thousand years, as evidence of storytelling can be found in many ancient cultures and languages. Early peoples used storytelling as a way of communication and preserving history, but it has its origins in play – it was used to entertain. Stories showcase imaginary worlds and characters, but as a way of fulfilling the need to explain reality, physical world, and also explaining natural and supernatural forces believed to be present at a particular time (weather, magic, religion) (Davies, 2007). This is similar to symbolic child play – they also create imaginary worlds, characters, and events to explain to themselves the world around them. When considering oral storytelling in a pre-primary setting, it differs from reading in that it is a medium of shared experience, it does not exclude children from speaking up and getting involved in the story, it asks them questions and offers opportunities for them to form opinions, develop critical thinking, empathy, social, and communication skills. It helps with listening and speaking skills and language development. Firstly, during storytelling, children are exposed to the language, vocabulary, rhythm, and other characteristics of the language, and language exposure has been established as a beneficial factor for successful language learning. Secondly, the story itself is a motivating factor – children will want to understand the language in order to understand the story. Lastly, children might want to discuss the story, or be a part of it during storytelling, which is a beneficial factor for developing language skills, and a possible lack of self-confidence for speaking can be overcome by high motivation given a positive environment. Storytelling is a medium that can be used to teach any topic, and across curriculum, because children easily relate to characters and are then emotionally engaged and motivated to learn. It is also a natural way of introducing books and reading to children (Davies, 2007). Written stories have origins in oral stories and storytelling, they are a step further in the humanity's effort to preserve history. They are strictly defined lengths of text that was originally intended to be read as it is. However, even when reading a written story, teachers can become storytellers. Emphasized here is the fact that during reading stories as they are, however entertaining and interesting the story is, the children are passive. Listening to a story can be a great source of language input and language exposure, but actively participating in the story offers more opportunities for children to use the language being taught and more opportunities to “engage”

with the characters using language confidently and creatively. Picture-books are stories expressed through (not necessarily) text, and illustrations. The illustrations offer children another way of understanding the language being said by the teacher, and explain the story further by exposing bits of information that are not in the text. When using picture-books in language teaching the cover pages alone can be a great starting point for creating a motivating atmosphere and inciting discussion by giving clues about the story to come.

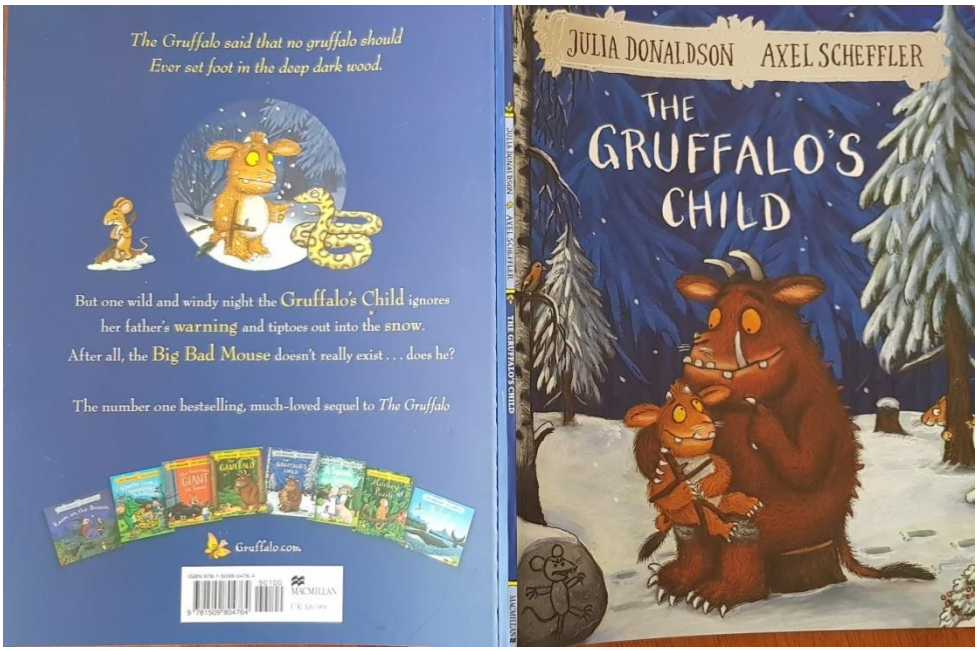


Figure 6. "The Gruffalo's child" by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler

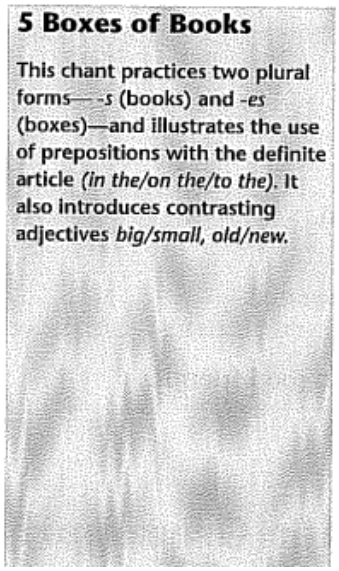
Figure 6 shows the picture-book "Gruffalo's child", written by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Axel Scheffler. Children will have already been introduced with the preceding picture-book, "The Gruffalo", and might have some assumptions about this one. The teacher can use that as a way of encouraging children to use the language and try to guess what will happen in the book. When continually reading picture-books in this way, the teacher can also establish a routine, a format that can later be led by one of the children. This way, every child will have the opportunity to "be the teacher", to use language confidently, and every child will have prolonged language exposure. Apart from language exposure and input, picture-books offer children a visual and tactile medium, and can be left in ELAs for children to "read" alone or in groups, maybe while engaging in symbolic play, and relive teacher-led

activities. That way language exposure is extended, and language usage encouraged during child-initiated free play.

5.2. Songs, rhymes, and chants

Music and rhythm are an essential part of language learning for young children because it makes imitating and remembering language significantly easier than the spoken language (Phillips, 1993). For young learners, songs such as popular pop-rock songs, traditional and educational songs, rhymes and chants are a valuable source of language. Songs are a type of listening activity that teach language concepts and patterns, serve as a source of pronunciation, intonation, and accent models, listening and speaking skills practice, and vocabulary development. They are a natural way of learning and provide a high level of motivation in children, because they are fun, exciting and enjoyable for them. Children do not perceive songs as learning activities, they perceive them as a pleasant and fun "break" in English lessons, making them more probable to repeat activities and use language. When using songs in language teaching, language is very often repeated – during a song, and while repeating the song (often asked for by children). In that way, children are exposed to language and language patterns multiple times, which results in better language retention (Delibegović Džanić, & Pejić, 2016). Using songs in activities is a versatile tool, both when considering the topics and materials, but also when considering methods. Songs can be used for listening, singing, dancing, but in the best scenario, for everything all at once, because it engages the children as a whole – their mind, their body, and their senses, which in turn makes children understand language much easier and much earlier during the lesson. There is a vast variety of songs, and some of the prominent types of songs for young learners are the following: action songs such as "The Hokey Pokey", or "Move and freeze", counting songs such as "One, two, buckle my shoe", or "One little finger", spelling songs such as "B-I-N-G-O", and special occasion songs such as Christmas, Halloween, or birthday songs (Phillips, 1993). Chants and rhymes are similar in that they have no melody, just rhythm. However, they are equally fun and enjoyable for children as songs are. One particular type of chants and rhymes children find fun and funny are nonsense rhymes and chants. They are a form of spoken language without meaning,

and with strong emphasis on rhythm. Nonsense rhymes and chants can also be created with, and by children. By simply starting to rhyme words, a skill they have acquired in their mother tongue, children can competently build rhythm and words in a chant that has no meaning. In that way, children practice language pronunciation, rhythm, and accent without necessarily using the language, feel competent and accomplished, and are likely to engage in such an activity during free-play. Later on, they will slowly become more proficient in the language learnt, they will have wider vocabulary, and they will start to form meaningful words when doing this activity. Nonsense rhymes, such as "The train" (Phillips, 1993) can have meaningful words, but no overall meaning. Those are very useful for repetition, language recycling, and language retention. Songs, rhymes, and chants can be used to indirectly teach grammar by offering repetitive and rhythmic structure of language. A great example are "grammarchants" (Figure 7) (Graham, 1993), originally created for older learners, but applicable and useful for young learners as well, as they do not know the grammar aims and goals the teacher wants to achieve, they see such chants as fun and playful.



5 Boxes of Books

This chant practices two plural forms—*-s* (books) and *-es* (boxes)—and illustrates the use of prepositions with the definite article *(in the/on the/to the)*. It also introduces contrasting adjectives *big/small, old/new.*

5 Boxes of Books

Boxes and boxes and boxes of books.
Big books, small books,
old books, new books.
Books on the bookshelf.
Books on the floor.
Books on the table
next to the door.
Books in the kitchen.
Books in the hall.
Books in the bedroom,
big and small.

Figure 7. Grammarchant "Boxes of books" (Graham, 1993, p. 4)

The versatility and the number of different songs, chants, and rhymes at disposal at this moment in time makes it possible to choose an appropriate song for any age

group, at any time, and for any topic that is taught, in cohesion with learner's interests, needs, abilities, and language levels.

5.3. Total physical response – TPR

Total physical response is a theory developed by Asher in the 1960s as a result of long-lasting observation of how very young children acquire language and how they communicate. After observation, Asher noticed some similarities that formed his hypothesis – he claimed that language is learnt primarily by listening, that it should engage the right hemisphere of the brain, and that it should cause no stress. He also proposed that language is comprehended before it can be spoken, because of the way human brain stores language. The left hemisphere is responsible for language comprehension and for speech, but the right hemisphere also deciphers language in association with actions. After the learner internalizes an extensive map of how target language works, speaking will appear spontaneously. Asher's assumptions led to the first experiment in 1965, involving four groups of students of the Japanese language. One group was the experimental group that listened to the Japanese language tape and saw and did the actions lead by an instructor, and the other three groups all listened to the same tape, but each had different inputs. One group just watched the instructor, one heard the English translation after each Japanese utterance, and one read the English translation while listening to the utterances. The experiment consisted of several different level tests and repeated tests, and each time the results showed longer language retention and better comprehension of the experimental group that was using the TPR method (Asher, 2009). Since then, he has written a book on TPR called "Learning Another Language Through Actions", that has become vastly popular, and many more have been written as an expansion or acclaim of this theory.

In teaching young English foreign language learners, TPR is a useful tool because it engages children via all of the five senses and via movement. Since young learners do not understand abstract concepts yet, this is a way for them to learn language in a concrete and "tangible" way (Reily & Ward, 1997). It is an instructional approach where learners follow directions, re-enact stories, follow songs with movement, and

do tasks (Gordon, 2007). It makes comprehension easier for children and in that way enables them to feel confident in using language later on. It is also fun, especially when it is integrated into other activities such as songs, stories, and games. A few examples of TPR activities are the songs "Head, shoulders, knees and toes", and "Tony Chestnut", the games "Simon says" and "Hello Mr. Crocodile", and many others.

5.4. Games

Children love to play – it is their basic need, and their "job". While playing, they gain experience and knowledge that is needed to function in life, mentally, intellectually, emotionally, and socially. Since their basic impulse is to play and explore, using games in pre-primary EFL teaching can be an extension of children's spontaneous play. The teacher's role is to provide ample materials and activities that are relevant and appropriate, to current topic, and for learners, interesting, fun, and motivating while still being linguistically challenging. When choosing game activities, teachers should know learner's age characteristics and set game rules in such a way that all children can understand and follow them, but should also choose games that can be changed and adapted to fit every child. Keeping in mind young children's concrete way of thinking and short attention span, it is good to have game props that children can see and manipulate. Teaching language through games offers many opportunities to introduce language formats, communication patterns, practise speaking skills, and develop social skills. However, while games are an excellent motivator, and while language can be taught easily through games simultaneously with children being unaware of the knowledge they have gained, they are usually very teacher-centred. It is important for teachers to decide what they should do themselves, and what children are able to do alone (Taylor, 2012). Teachers must have in mind several factors when choosing game activity – the language which the activity targets, skills that it practices, type of game, whether the game fits the learners, whether it is complex or simple enough for them, if there is enough interaction and participation for every child, and finally, if they themselves like the game (Hong, 2002).

6. CONCLUSION

Pre-primary English foreign language teaching is a responsible and complex task as it demands constant re-thinking, creative organizing, and informed decision making in order to ensure the best environment and opportunities for learners to reach their potential. In order to be able to do so, teachers require a high quality education in a specific field that includes both early childhood education and language learning, because of the characteristics of children that age. However, in the majority of the world, pre-primary educators or teachers are educated in just one of these areas, so further research and advances in teacher education are needed. Furthermore, teachers require a high quality environment and provisional resources. This is in practice often scarce – the number of children is high, space is limited, and materials and resources are not always provided by the institution, so teachers have to make or buy them themselves, which is, for some, not possible. Another issue that arises in practice is a lack of communication between external EFL teachers and pre-primary educators that work with the same children, which results in learners not having continuity, consistency and prolonged language exposure that they would benefit from. Pre-primary EFL teaching could have very positive long term effects on learners, providing the right circumstances. When EFL teaching is conducted by pre-primary educators (educated in pre-primary English teaching), they can organize activities and environment in such a way that it facilitates language learning through prolonged child-initiated activity, integration of the English language in daily activities and routines, and communication with parents. When EFL teaching is conducted by external language teachers, good communication and cooperation between teachers and pre-primary educators is important to achieve the same: teachers can prepare and manage EFL lessons, and educators can provide children with environment, materials and resources during their daily life (in ELAs or during other daily routines). However, in practice, the "human factor" often becomes the main factor. Foremost, teacher education and experience, but also teachers' motivation and work atmosphere have an immense effect on the quality of teaching.

This calls for a specific, yet flexible pre-primary EFL teaching framework that would formally set a standard, both provisional (mainly for institutions, to unburden teachers) and teaching (mainly for teachers), that everyone involved could follow and achieve.

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IZJAVA O SAMOSTALNOJ IZRADI RADA

Izjavljujem da sam samostalno izradila završni rad pod nazivom *Pre-primary EFL teaching – a review of literature* u akademskoj godini 2018./2019.

potpis:

IZJAVA O JAVNOJ OBJAVI RADA

Izjavljujem da dajem pristanak Sveučilištu u Zagrebu, Učiteljskom fakultetu da javno objavi završni rad *Pre-primary EFL teaching – a review of literature.*

potpis: