

# Developing teaching competences of primary EFL students - a review od literature

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**DEVELOPING TEACHING COMPETENCES  
OF PRIMARY EFL STUDENTS – A REVIEW  
OF LITERATURE**

**Zagreb, srpanj 2020.**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

Ime i prezime pristupnika: Dijana Halužan

TEMA DIPLOMSKOG RADA: DEVELOPING TEACHING  
COMPETENCES OF PRIMARY EFL STUDENTS – A REVIEW OF  
LITERATURE

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## **SUMMARY**

Teaching a foreign language is a complicated process which requires competent teachers in order to be successful. But which competences does a competent foreign language teacher possess?

This thesis deals with developing teaching competences of primary EFL students. The author provides information on the general definition(s) of competences, teachers' training and qualifications on a global scale as well as defining competences in various European countries, especially focusing on Croatia and foreign language teachers' competences in primary schools. Furthermore, the thesis deals with the development of English language teacher competences through the integrated undergraduate and graduate study for primary teacher education with English at the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb (UFZG). This program of study is compared to other English language programs of study at four other faculties in Croatia: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, University of Rijeka (FFRI), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, University of Zagreb (FFZG), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, University of Osijek (FFOS), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zadar, University of Zadar (UNIZD). The last chapter points out to the importance of acquiring and developing professional competences as well as some ways in which this could be done, ensuring adequate opportunities for further professional development in the teaching expertise.

Key words: initial teacher education, EFL teaching, competences, development of professional competences

## SAŽETAK

Poučavanje stranog jezika složen je proces za koji su potrebni kompetentni učitelji da bi bio uspješan. Ali koje kompetencije posjeduje kompetentan učitelj stranog jezika?

Ovaj rad govori o razvoju nastavnih kompetencija studenata, budućih učitelja engleskog jezika. Autorica pruža informacije o općoj definiciji kompetencija, obrazovanju nastavnika i kvalifikacijama na globalnoj razini kao i definiranju kompetencija u raznim europskim zemljama, usredotočujući se na Hrvatsku i kompetencije učitelja stranih jezika u osnovnim školama. Nadalje, rad se bavi razvojem kompetencija učitelja engleskog jezika tijekom integriranog preddiplomskog i diplomskog učiteljskog studija s engleskim jezikom na Učiteljskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu (UFZG). Ovaj studijski program uspoređuje se s ostalim studijskim programima engleskog jezika na četiri druga fakulteta u Hrvatskoj: Filozofski fakultet u Rijeci, Sveučilište u Rijeci (FFRI), Filozofski fakultet u Zagrebu, Sveučilište u Zagrebu (FFZG), Filozofski fakultet u Osijeku, Sveučilište u Osijeku (FFOS), Filozofski fakultet u Zadru, Sveučilište u Zadru (UNIZD). U posljednjem poglavlju ističe se važnost stjecanja i razvoja profesionalnih kompetencija, kao i neki načini kojima je to moguće ostvariti, osiguravajući adekvatne mogućnosti za daljnji profesionalni razvoj unutar učiteljske struke.

Ključne riječi: početno obrazovanje učitelja, poučavanje engleskog kao stranoga jezika, kompetencije, razvoj profesionalnih kompetencija

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching a foreign language is quite a task in itself. Teaching a foreign language to children is even more complicated, since the foreign language teacher is a person of great importance – a leader which motivates them to learn a foreign language (Coyle & Verdú, 2000; Pavičić & Bagarić, 2005). Any teacher bears huge responsibility for all actions which have an influence on the quality of acquiring knowledge (Franušić, 1999).

A foreign language teacher working with children must be familiar with young children's development (cognitive and psycholinguistic) and with the fundamentals of glottodidactics needed for a successful teaching process. Moreover, a foreign language teacher should be able to organize age-appropriate lessons for children of various ages and levels of proficiency (Radišić, Pavičić Takač, & Bagarić, 2003).

According to research carried out within the ELLiE<sup>1</sup> project regarding early language learning, specific competences which foreign language teachers need to possess are: positive attitude toward and fondness of the foreign language being taught, belief in the benefits of teaching the foreign language at an early age, ability to create a positive and safe learning environment, providing support and creating opportunities for learners to feel successful, and ability to keep learners focused and on-task (Tragant Mestres & Lundberg, 2011, p. 100). Another research shows that experience and teacher education are the two key elements regarding the teaching of a foreign language (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2004). Student-teachers face a difficult task when entering the profession – they are required to possess many competences, some of which are the knowledge of setting the aims of a certain activity, choosing learning techniques or strategies and choosing or designing appropriate teaching material for learners. Without these competences, they will get lost in the complexity of the teaching expertise (Vrhovac, 2000).

In Croatia, there are two faculties at which it is possible to attain a qualification for an English teacher. The first option is the Faculty of Teacher education, which includes a study program for elementary teachers with English. After completing this program,

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<sup>1</sup> The ELLiE (Early Language Learning in Europe) project dealt with the efficiency of teaching foreign languages in primary schools in European countries. It began with a one year scoping study in 2006-7, followed by a three-year longitudinal study (2007-2010). The researchers brought attention to the significance of the teacher's skill as a factor in successful foreign language learning.



students are generalist teachers with a major in a foreign language. This kind of double major study program is focused on acquiring comprehensive teaching competences with special attention given to courses within which specific competences for working with elementary school children are developed (Gehrman & Petravić, 2005, p. 201). This means that student-teachers at this faculty become familiar with teaching a foreign language in the context of young learners, lower primary as well as upper primary level students.

The second option is becoming a specialist teacher by completing an English language study program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. This study program is focused on teaching a foreign language in a broader context. For instance, this study program in the 2001/2002 academic year did not incorporate courses specifically concerning early language learning (Mihaljević Djigunović & Zergollern Miletić, 2003, p. 86). In addition, there are minor changes when it comes to that, which is worrying considering the fact that initial teacher education should primarily be concerned with future learners, having in mind their age as an important factor (Vilke & Mihaljević Djigunović, 2000, p. 152).

Initial teacher education should provide future teachers with practical knowledge of the foreign language, theoretical knowledge about the foreign language and foreign language teaching, an insight into the current teaching practice, and practical knowledge of teaching methodology that is acquired within pre-service training (Mihaljević Djigunović & Zergollern Miletić, 2003, p. 78). Moreover, 20-30% of a five-year study program should be focused on acquiring teaching competences (Mihaljević Djigunović & Mardešić, 2009, p. 318). Within the areas of theoretical knowledge about the language, practical knowledge of the language, second language acquisition, foreign language teaching methodology and education science, specific teaching competences are developed. (Mihaljević Djigunović & Mardešić, 2009, p. 324).

This thesis deals with competences in further detail, mentioning the definition(s) of competences in various countries, comparing different English language study programs and the development of competences throughout these programs, and briefly discussing further professional development throughout a foreign language teacher's career.

## **2. THE DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCES**

Nowadays, teachers are finding themselves in situations which require the competences to adapt to any challenges that come with the ever-lasting changes in education. Possessing all the competences needed for teaching in the modern times is very unlikely due to the massive range and complexity of them. That is why there should be more focus put on the competences of an education system or of a teaching team (European Commission, 2013). When talking about competences, mentioning skills is inevitable. However, competences need to be differentiated from skills. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a skill is 'the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance.' What about competence? Well, there is no universal definition of competence. One definition which stands out is that competence is 'a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desire which lead to effective, embodied, human action in the world, in a particular domain' (Deakin Crick, 2008).

Ministers of Education have discussed the competences needed to work as teachers on three occasions (European Union 2007, 2008, 2009). They came to the conclusion that there is a minimum which needs to be fulfilled, and that minimum is having specialist knowledge of the subject(s) that is taught and the fundamental pedagogical skills to teach them. The development of competences for teachers is somewhat slow. Research has confirmed that at least three to five years are mandatory to see improvement. The complicated mechanism of a teacher's practical thinking results in complex cognitive processes for the development of professional knowledge (European Commission, 2013). That is why the Ministers of Education concluded that developing competences requires constant effort throughout a teacher's career:

'No course of initial teacher education, however excellent, can equip teachers with all the competences they will require during their careers. Demands on the teaching profession are evolving rapidly, imposing the need for new approaches' (European Union, 2009).

Discussing competences leads to broader discussions such as:

- assumptions about learning;
- the purposes of education;
- society's expectations of, and demands on, the teacher;
- available resources, priorities and political will;

- the status of the profession;
- perceived external or international pressures;
- existing traditions and culture;
- the broader societal context in which teaching and teacher education occur (Conway et al., 2009).

Competence in teaching takes into consideration knowledge, skills and dispositions (beliefs, motivation, emotions) (Rychen & Salganik, 2003) and enables the teachers to appropriately react in various situations (Koster & Dengerink, 2008).

There are two sets of competences closely related to teaching. The first set comprises teaching competences, which are directly related to the knowledge and skills needed for teaching something in the classroom. Therefore, the role of the teacher in the classroom is the center of focus. On the other hand, teacher competences are concerned with a systemic perception of the teacher on the professional networks level, local community, the school and the individual level. These two sets of competences often have a point of intersection since they take into consideration the experiences and professional lives of teachers (OECD, 2009).

Teacher competences have been defined as ‘dynamic combinations of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills’ (González & Wagenaar, 2005) which leads to four elemental features: learning to think, know, feel and act as teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2008).

The beliefs, motivation and emotions of teacher play an important role in both teaching and teacher competences. These dispositions have a great effect on teachers being open to further development of competences as well as the motivation for being creative and innovative in their approach towards teaching. Moreover, they have an effect on being open to collaboration.

A teacher who is no stranger to self-assessment on the criteria coming from research, theory and practice as well as a teacher who is eager to have an open attitude towards consistent professional improvement is a teacher who will be successfully prepared and qualified for whatever challenge he/she may face (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006).

### **3. TEACHERS' TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS ON A GLOBAL SCALE**

Initial teacher training is considered to be crucial for future teachers, but it differentiates from country to country. Some governments provide a basic educational qualification for all teachers, nevertheless the age of the learners or the subject that they will be teaching. However, other countries provide specialized training which prepares teachers to fulfill the specific requirements needed for teaching specific age groups and subjects.

According to Cameron (2001), there are two frequent fallacies about teaching to young learners. The first one is that anyone with a basic training in English Language Teaching (ELT) can teach English to young learners because teaching English is uncomplicated. The second one is that children are much less cognitively developed than teenage or adult learners and, therefore, language that is taught to them does not have the need to be complex, but simple.

Specific training is considered to be a requisite for teaching English (Cameron, 2001). Teachers around the world enter the teaching profession with different qualifications and experiences. For example, some teachers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) teach English to young learners, although they have a qualification for teaching to adults only. They adjust their techniques to fulfill the needs of young learners, successfully or not. Other teachers enter the profession with the training for primary teaching, but without training for teaching English (Howard, 2012).

Teaching practice, which is supervised, is a crucial element of Initial Teacher Training programs, since they provide feedback and evaluation for future teachers. However, not every country requires future teachers to take part in teaching practice that they may work in schools.

A global research study has been conducted on the topic of teachers' qualifications and training around the world<sup>2</sup>, and 89 countries took part in it. The teachers were asked to explain their qualifications for teaching English. Considering the effort of developed

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<sup>2</sup> Data for this research study was collected via the use of a survey in electronic format, and face-to-face personal interviews with teachers around the world. Teachers from 89 countries participated in the survey, including Croatia. The participants represented urban and rural teachers who worked in private and state schools. The survey gathered almost 2,500 responses.

countries to make sure that teaching is an all-graduate profession, the results were unanticipated. The percentage of teachers who said that they were not qualified to teach English was unexpectedly high, 21 percent. Another 35 percent admitted that they were not qualified to teach primary level learners. On the other hand, 38 percent of teachers had a degree and 25 percent held a Master's Degree. Having so many teachers who were not specifically qualified for teaching English to primary level learners is worrisome. In addition, 26 percent of teachers reported that the duration of their teaching practice was less than four weeks altogether. However, 77 percent said that their initial teacher training consisted of mandatory teaching practice, and 26 percent confirmed that it lasted for more than 20 weeks. Furthermore, 53 percent of them reported that most or all of the teaching practice was focused on the age group that they teach at the moment. On the other hand, 20 percent of teachers reported otherwise, saying that it was scarcely devoted or not devoted at all. These percentages give us an insight on the differentiation between teachers who are adequately qualified and trained, and the ones who lack both qualification and training (Emery, 2012).

In terms of professional development since finishing the initial teacher training and qualifying for the job, a large number of teachers (85 percent) reported that they decided to participate in some sort of training course. Ministries of Education were the ones responsible for organizing these training courses according to 54 percent of teachers, while only 29 percent said the same for local teacher associations. A plethora of teachers who had not taken part in any training courses admitted that they would be eager to attend training courses or workshops as a part of their further career development. Learning about new methods of teaching, children's psychology, classroom management, dealing with parents as well as getting and sharing experiences with other teachers, refreshing ideas and just keeping up to date are just some of the reasons teachers mentioned when asked to explain why they would like to have further training (Emery, 2012).

When asked about whether they were members of a teacher association, only 30 percent confirmed that they were. Surprisingly, 67 percent expressed doubt about its benefits and remarked about its cost (Emery, 2012).

#### **4. HOW DOES EUROPE DEFINE COMPETENCES? EXAMPLES FROM AROUND EUROPE**

Members of the European Commission's Thematic Working Group 'Professional Development of Teachers' carried out a survey in 2011 and updated it in 2013. The results of this survey showed that national education curricula usually provide some general guidelines (such as methodological competences) required for teaching as recommendations for initial teacher education or further professional development. Countries in which this is the case are Cyprus, Finland, Spain, Germany and Croatia. These general guidelines are then observed in order to establish the development of exact competences, which are required in teacher education programs.

In other countries, for example in Hungary, Poland, Luxembourg, Slovenia and France, initial teacher education and further professional development consist of broader competences areas such as assessment competences. In Poland, there is an evident conversion towards using outcomes when describing initial teacher education standards. Specific subject profile requirements can be found in a list of broad competence areas, as in Germany (European Commission, 2013).

On the contrary, precise lists of specific competences, such as lists of knowledge, skills, attitudes etc., can be found in a few countries (Estonia, the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium). These structured frameworks are often connected to professional standards and career advancement and use various terms in order to differentiate levels of expertise in the profession, for example 'advanced teacher' or 'beginner'. In some countries (Austria, Ireland) policies about teacher competences use the concept of a continuum to describe competences. For instance, Austria has a program for professional development in terms of a quality continuum called EPIK (European Commission, 2013).

Reforms also have an impact on competence definitions in some countries (Germany, Czech Republic, Estonia, Austria, Ireland, Latvia, Spain, Cyprus, Poland and Sweden).

Descriptions of competence with exact qualifications by subject and school level for initial teacher education have been developed in Sweden since 2006. Something similar exists in Spain also since 2006, when due to a national law certain guidelines for university curricula were established in order to be followed by initial teacher education programs. Moreover, using competence descriptions when assessing

working teachers' professional development has been discussed as well (European Commission, 2013).

Competence descriptions are also used for initial teacher education in Hungary, defining the outcomes of teacher education programs for different school levels.

In addition, teacher competence descriptions are also used in Latvia, not concerning only initial teacher education, but further professional development as well.

The Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture (KMK) in Germany has established precise standards in the *Bildungswissenschaften* (psychology, pedagogy and sociology) as well as subject-specific matters. These standards consist of list of competences which are meant to be guidelines for teacher education programs in Universities across Germany. Policy makers in ministries of each of the *Länder* are required to take these standards into consideration (European Commission, 2013).

Detailed competence frameworks are more common in the Netherlands and UK, especially in Scotland. In the Netherlands, there are seven key teacher competences which are described on three different levels. The first level is concerning the visible aspects of the competence. These aspects provide an answer to questions such as what must be achieved and in what way. Furthermore, the next level deals with competence requirements. This is related to specific professional knowledge, skills and attitude. At last, the third level is concerned with proving competence in terms of concrete professional actions (European Commission, 2013).

In Scotland, there is a detailed framework consisting of three dimensions – knowledge, skills and values. Each of these competence dimensions are interdependent and contain lists of specific aspects. These standards, introduced by the government in 2000, are widespread among teachers of all subjects and levels.

It is clear that countries vary in many factors (e.g. the level of detail when describing competences, whether the competence description are only for initial teacher education or further professional development, the policy tools used) and are yet to define more precisely the competences their teachers are required to possess (European Commission, 2013).

## **5. FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' COMPETENCES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA**

In Croatia, a booklet<sup>3</sup> which consists of descriptions of competences required for foreign language teachers was produced. This booklet is called *Competences of Primary School Foreign Language Teachers in the Republic of Croatia* (Bagarić et al., 2007) and it contains descriptions of characteristics, descriptions of knowledge and descriptions of skills and abilities. The order of the descriptions goes from general to the specific in terms of foreign language teaching in primary schools. This booklet defines what a foreign language teacher should specifically know (facts) as well as what a teacher should be familiar with in terms of general knowledge. Furthermore, it defines ways in which teachers should take action, a.k.a. skills and abilities. In conclusion, this booklet provides a systemic overview of competences which foreign language teachers should acquire and professionally develop later on.

Since it provides an explanation of what teaching a foreign language requires and what competent teachers are supposed to be doing, this booklet can be used when creating new documents which are concerned with competences, such as promotions of teachers or establishing standards for good teaching practices.

There is no doubt that institutions providing various segments of teacher education, from initial teacher education at college level to the career-long education and professional development of teachers, are influenced by these defined descriptions of competences. There is a common goal for which these institutions need to work together, and that goal is reaching and preserving a high level of professionalism among the foreign language teaching expertise (Bagarić et al., 2007).

Moreover, this booklet gives an insight into competences both to institutions and teachers. Using it, institutions which are responsible for the quality and development of teachers can recognize if the competences are being acquired and developed. On the other hand, teachers can use it for self-assessment purposes and future plans for their further professional development.

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<sup>3</sup> This booklet was the result of the TEMPUS project, which promoted institutional collaboration between Partner Countries (in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, the Mediterranean region) and the EU in order to reform and modernize higher education systems.



This booklet divides competences into subject specific and educational competences, which are considered to be the two basic competences areas.

Subject specific competences are furthermore divided into two groups:

1. competences related to language and culture
2. competences related to the teaching of foreign languages

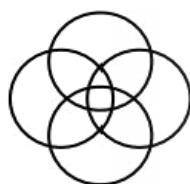
The first group, competences related to language and culture, refers to communicative language and intercultural teacher competences. Sociolinguistic, linguistic and pragmatic competences are a part of communicative language and they call attention to the obligatory level of knowledge of a foreign language, which is considered to be B2 or C1 with some elements of C2, according to the Common European Framework (2001).

Teaching cultural elements of a foreign language is possible when having the skills and the knowledge for it. These skills and knowledge are part of possessing intercultural competence. Teachers should not separate language and culture, but understand the connection between them in order to teach and develop intercultural competence (Bagarić et al., 2007).

The second group, competences related to the teaching of foreign languages, points out to the glottodidactical and methodological skills and knowledge mandatory for teaching.

The second basic competences area is the area of educational competences which include educational science (general pedagogical-psychological competences, competences related to classroom instruction, competences related to out-of-class activities and intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristic and skills) and competences related to lifelong learning (competences related to knowledge of educational systems, competences related to the development and improvement of language teaching skills, competences related to the improvement of language skills).

Competences from both these groups are interconnected and this booklet presents an understanding of competences as a whole, which can help teachers when it comes to their professional development throughout their careers (Bagarić et al., 2007).



*Figure 1. Overlapping of competences (Bagarić et al., 2007)*

### **5.1. Subject-specific competences**

The first group of subject-specific competences includes competences related to language and culture: communicative language competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences) and intercultural competence.

**Linguistic competences** are concerned with the necessary knowledge of vocabulary, semantics, phonology and grammar. A foreign language teacher should possess the fundamental knowledge of vocabulary in fields such as everyday conversation or school life as well as metalinguistic vocabulary needed for individual research and further professional development and improvement. Moreover, a foreign language teacher should be able to discern the meaning of words based on the connection between words and context. The crucial knowledge of pronunciation, intonation, stress and spelling is also needed in order to be a successful teacher of a foreign language. Lastly, having knowledge of grammar (especially, morphology and syntax) and using that knowledge successfully when teaching a foreign language is also an important asset (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Sociolinguistic competences** imply that a teacher should possess the knowledge of language varieties (sociolects, dialects, etc.) and language registers (informal, formal, etc.) in order to fulfill the demands of the social dimension of language. Besides linguistic elements, teachers should be aware of paralinguistic elements, such as gestures, rhythm and similar, in order to use them in teaching. Being aware of the strong bond between foreign language and culture is also included in sociolinguistic competences (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Pragmatic competences** of a foreign language teacher include discourse competence, functional competences, design competence and strategic competence. Discourse competence is the knowledge of the ways in which various messages can be organized. This is connected to functional competence, which is the knowledge of the ways in

which messages fulfill communicative functions. Design competence is concerned with the concept according to which these messages can be sequenced. The strategic competence includes knowledge of various strategies and solutions when it comes to communicative problems (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Intercultural competence** includes the ability to compare two cultures (the one the teacher lives in and the one whose language is taught), their cultural differences and similarities in order to respect them. Moreover, it includes the ability to teach intercultural competence in a way that encourages the students to understand, tolerate, look at different cultures from a critical viewpoint and learn to avoid unnecessary stereotypes and generalizations. Teachers also help to develop the student's self-assessment of cultural opinions and experiences, and their capability for non-linguistic and linguistic intercultural communication. At last, possessing intercultural competence means that teachers are able to critically assess teaching materials which contain cultural contents (Bagarić et al., 2007).

The second group of subject-specific competences are competences related to the teaching of foreign languages. It consists of competences related to general theories of language acquisition, competences related to application of the knowledge of Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teaching theories and competences related to evaluation and assessment of the student's communicative language competence.

When it comes to **competences related to general theories of language acquisition**, foreign language teachers are required to know crucial theories of child psychology (cognitive and psycholinguistic development), modern theories of language acquisition, (first, second and foreign language), various theories of foreign language teaching (traditional, modern, alternative theories), and contemporary principles of foreign language teaching and learning when it comes to young learners (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Competences related to application of the knowledge of MFL teaching theories** incorporate the teacher's knowledge and ability to methodically develop learners' language skills (listening, speaking, reading writing) with the help of numerous tools, teaching materials, activities, aids and technical equipment. To add, organizing lessons which are age and level appropriate to the foreign language knowledge of learners is also considered to be a competence related to the application of the knowledge of MFL

teaching theories. When organizing lessons, a teacher has to be focused on choosing adequate activities, using diversified forms of interaction (individual, pair work, whole class and etc.), paying attention to time organization, using different teaching aids and materials, adjusting teaching methods and techniques to individual student's needs, establishing and expanding the student's diverse strategies, and creating a motivating atmosphere for language learning (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Competences related to evaluation and assessment of the student's communicative language competence** involve knowledge of theory related to assessment, evaluation and self-evaluation for creating tests and assessing learners' assignments. Moreover, teachers should motivate students to practice self-assessment as well as peer-assessment. However, they should encourage students not to be afraid of making a mistake and keep a positive outlook on making them overall (Bagarić et al., 2007).

## **5.2. Educational competences**

The two major branches of educational competences are pedagogical-psychological competences and competences related to lifelong learning.

General pedagogical-psychological competences, competences related to classroom instruction, competences related to out-of-class activities and intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics and skills are all considered to be pedagogical-psychological competences.

**General pedagogical-psychological competences** are concerned with the knowledge of general pedagogy, for instance knowledge of general pedagogical concepts, education concepts, systems of education and similar. Moreover, these competences are also related to the knowledge of general, developmental and educational psychology, for example the knowledge of psychophysical child development, the knowledge of speech and cognitive development, the knowledge of the roles of play and creativity and similar. Teachers are also required to be familiar with special pedagogy so they could teach children with difficulties and disorders successfully, for example children struggling with school fears and anxieties, children with problems in learning a foreign language (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyslalia), children with ADHD and so on. Lastly, having knowledge of pedagogy used in alternative schools as well as

various approaches in both psychological and pedagogical research is also a necessity for teachers (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Competences related to classroom instruction** point out that teachers should know how to handle a classroom of mixed students from different backgrounds (cultural, social, religious, etc.) as well as students of diverse age and abilities. In addition, teachers should pay special attention to children with special needs and adjust their teaching methods in order to teach them successfully. Establishing a motivating classroom atmosphere for learning a foreign language is also a must, which is related to the knowledge of using different methods of learning (autonomous, cooperative and interactive) and using them in the teaching process as well as organizing and using various teaching and learning resources and the learning space. Teachers are required to possess knowledge of school docimology in order to assess and evaluate learners' knowledge and skills accordingly. In case of conflicts and violence in school, teachers should be able to solve those kinds of problems (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Competences related to out-of-class activities** suppose that foreign language teachers are familiar with certain documents, such as school and pedagogical documents. Moreover, teachers should be familiar with the development of the curriculum and should have the knowledge of lesson planning as well as planning with other teachers in order to provide the learners a chance to learn out of the classroom (for example, visiting companies, theatres and similar). Collaboration and advice from more experienced teachers or experts when it comes to children with special needs is also something that foreign language teachers have to be ready for. Other than dealing with learners and colleagues, teachers have to know the rights of parents in the teaching process and establish an efficient way of communication with them (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics and skills** incorporate a teacher's understanding of oneself and others in the teaching process. When it comes to intrapersonal characteristics and skills, foreign language teachers need to have the ability to make decisions, take responsibility for the teaching process, appreciate the linguistic and cultural aspects of their expertise, acknowledge their own skills and intelligence, question themselves, manage possible abrupt reactions, deal with internal conflicts and feelings, assess their own work critically and be committed to the educational development of learners and teaching/learning results. Interpersonal

characteristics and skills take into consideration the understanding of learners and parents and building positive relationships, which implies profitably cooperating with them. Teachers should be advocates for pushing positive values, attitudes and behavior, but they should also be respectful of students since there might be a difference between them (Bagarić et al., 2007).

Competences related to lifelong learning include competences related to the knowledge of educational systems, competences related to development and improvement of language teaching skills and competences related to improvement of language skills (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Competences related to the knowledge of educational systems** point out that foreign language teachers should be up to date with relevant legal documentation, both on a national and European level (e.g. the Croatian National Curriculum, the Croatian National Standards of Education, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and similar) (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Competences related to development and improvement of language teaching skills** take into consideration further development of methodological skills and knowledge which could be done by participating in various courses, workshops, lectures and conferences, reading professional literature, writing and publishing professional papers and articles and working towards the promotion to specific degrees (teacher-advisor, teacher-mentor) (Bagarić et al., 2007).

**Competences related to the improvement of language skills** are focused on developing communicative language competences and intercultural competence. This can be accomplished in cooperation with the Education Agency, the Ministry of Science and Education<sup>4</sup> as well as many foreign institutions which are advocates for foreign language teaching and learning (e.g. British Council, French Alliance, Goethe Institute). These institutions offer many benefits for teachers, e.g. organizing lectures, workshops, courses and granting scholarships for courses, gaining experience by participating in various projects on a national as well as international level, being

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<sup>4</sup> Previously called 'The Ministry of Science, Education and Sport'.

active in organizations and associations of foreign language teachers (e.g. TESOL, IATEFL) and similar (Bagarić et al., 2007).

## **6. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER COMPETENCES THROUGH THE INTEGRATED UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE UNIVERSITY STUDY FOR PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION WITH ENGLISH**

The Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb has introduced the University Study for Primary Teacher Education with English in 2005/2006. This program of study lasts for 10 semesters and is simultaneous – it incorporates an integrated undergraduate and graduate double major program of study (0+5) containing 300 ECTS in total. Students who complete the study are given the professional title of Master of Primary Education. The English language program of study contains 40 courses, among which are the compulsory 1290 hours of direct teaching, as well as 105 hours of the Teaching Practice course and 150 hours of Classroom Practice Course (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014).

The English language program is split into four parts. The first part contains 13 language courses mainly focused on developing students' communicative competence to the C1 level of the CEFR, which follows the recommendation that foreign language teachers are required to achieve the B2-C1 level with some elements of C2. This part also consists of developing the use of academic language through written discourse of professional literature. Overall, these courses have a great impact on developing basic theoretical knowledge of modern English language and high communicative competence.

The second part has its main focus on developing students' intercultural competence and includes two courses as well as one more course concerned with early EL teaching, having in mind the cultural aspect of teaching a foreign language. When it comes to teaching a foreign language in primary school, these courses play a significant part in developing as well as teaching intercultural competence to learners – encouraging students to be aware of their own culture as well as other cultures and understanding the differences between them.

The third part is mostly concerned with literature, containing 5 courses through which students become familiar with basic literary theory. Moreover, the students are obliged to independently read various literary texts (both contemporary and older) as well as get to know different aspects (theoretical, historical, methodological) of children's literature when teaching the English language.

The fourth part is mostly concerned with teaching methodology courses and it consists of 16 teaching methodology courses. The Teaching Practice course is especially worth mentioning since it is organized in a real classroom and requires direct work with pupils. In addition, Culture in Early English Language Learning and Literature in English Language Teaching and other similar courses also include teaching methodology topics, even though they have cultural and literary aspects. Besides teaching methodology courses related directly to teaching English, students also have various general courses (General Pedagogy, School Pedagogy, Philosophy of Education, Developmental Psychology, Theory of Teaching and Education, Curriculum, Special Needs Pedagogy, Motivation and Social Relations in the Classroom), which are concentrated on developing elemental competences for primary teachers, as well as English language teachers (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014).

Overall, this program of study provides a lot of theoretical courses, but always takes the question of applying theory in practice in consideration. The crucial part of this program of study has always been student teaching practice, which is mandatory for all students from the first year. Although this teaching practice is focused on the primary education program, part of it is modified for English language students, who have to fulfill certain tasks regarding ELT. In addition, English language students have about 150 hours of practice concerning only ELT from the fourth to the eighth semester, which provides them multiple chances to observe and actively participate in the teaching process, to become familiar with content-based language, various learning styles and strategies and assessment of pupils (Domović & Cindrić, 2009). Furthermore, all English language students go through the teaching practice at the American International School of Zagreb, which is a great opportunity for them to get multicultural experiences. The Faculty also provides a student exchange program in cooperation with the Teacher Training School of the University College Hogeschool Antwerpen in Belgium, through which they have a chance to observe the Flemish



system of primary education. At last, as part of the Teaching Practice Course in the fifth year of study, all English language students are required to engage in the teaching process.

English language students become acquainted with all crucial topics when it comes to teaching methodology. Teaching methodology courses throughout the program of study show them how to teach EFL as well as prepare them for lifelong learning. The courses provide knowledge of various theories such as language acquisition, using appropriate teaching materials, developing intercultural competence and similar. Students are also prepared for recognizing and adjusting to the needs of the pupils as well as teaching the students to use the learning strategies which fulfill their needs successfully. Moreover, these courses explain different types of curricula, especially related to teaching English. Students are asked to critically observe and assess both national and school curricula concerning English. Besides curricula, English language students become acquainted with other educational documents and instruments (EPOSTL, CEFL, CLIL, ELP). All in all, this program of study makes sure to establish and consistently evolve future teachers' competences as well as generate practitioners will actively work on further professional development after completing the study (Cindrić, Andracka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014).

### **6.1. Generic competences, specific competences and areas of knowledge acquired throughout the program of study**

A study by Ivana Cindrić, Marija Andracka and Milka Bilić-Štefan was conducted in order to find out the opinions of student-teachers concerning a plethora of generic and specific teaching competences and the development of these competences throughout the Teaching Practice Course as well as the program of study in general. Teaching practice in the fifth year consists of a passive (observing mentors and observing other students) and an active aspect (teaching a full class in front of others). After each class, regular analyses are held.

There were 37 participants who needed to complete an identical three-part questionnaire at the beginning and the end of the fifth year of study. The first two parts consisted of 14 generic and specific competences. The student-teachers evaluated the importance of these competences as well as how much they would be developed

throughout the Teaching Practice Course. The third part required the evaluation of the presence of different areas of theory in the professional competence of English teachers, which were attained throughout the Teaching Practice Course.

The **generic competences** which were tested were: *Planning and time management, Problem solving, Critical and self-critical abilities, Teamwork, Interpersonal skills, Capacity for applying knowledge in practice, Capacity to adapt to new situations, Capacity for generating new ideas (creativity), Ability to work autonomously, Concern for quality, General knowledge, Social responsibility, Initiative and entrepreneurial spirit* and *Ethical commitment*. At the end of the year, the students approximated that all the competences were even more important than they initially thought they were. They shifted their perception when it comes to the order of the most significant competences and estimated that the competences *Capacity to adapt to new situations* and *Capacity for applying knowledge in practice* were at the top, while *Teamwork, General knowledge* and *Social responsibility* were at the bottom. The students also recognized the importance of the competence *Concern for quality* since there was a big difference between the initial and final estimation (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014).

The students also had to estimate the range of development of these competences during the Teaching Practice Course. At the end of the year, they estimated that they have noticeably developed all the competences, including the competence *Ability to work autonomously*, which was developed the most. The competences *Capacity to adapt to new situations, Capacity to apply knowledge in practice, Creativity* and *Critical and self-critical abilities* were developed remarkably more than initially estimated. The biggest differences were found in the results of the development of five competences: *Interpersonal skills, Capacity to adapt to new situations, Critical and self-critical abilities, Planning and time management* and *Problem solving*. The development of these five competences seems to be related to constant lesson analyses. (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014).

Constant lesson analyses are excellent for providing feedback and preparing students for further professional development after finishing their initial teacher education. However, some students may struggle with accepting criticism. At the end of the course, that is usually not a problem anymore.

The Teaching Practice course also consists of filling in lesson observation forms (holistic observation forms, teaching assessment forms, self-assessment forms), which are mandatory. These teaching assessment forms are a good way for the students to think and reflect on others as well as oneself. Nevertheless, most of the things on those forms are discussed during regular analyses. Moreover, after completing the course, students are required to write a teaching practice report, which gives the mentors an insight into students' opinions as well as their final thoughts on the Teaching Practice course and the program of study in general.

There were 14 **specific competences** estimated by the students: *Understanding the process of foreign language learning, Understanding the process of foreign language teaching, Ability to learn by observing others, Ability to learn through reflective practice, Ability to assess and test communicative language competences, Ability to select teaching materials, Ability to evaluate the teaching plan and program, Ability to implement the curricula and syllabus, Awareness of the factors influencing foreign language learning, Ability to motivate pupils, Detecting pupil's needs, Ability to adapt teaching to pupils' needs and abilities, Classroom management skills and Ability to use the ELP*. At the end of the year, the competence *Ability to use the ELP* was estimated as least important. The most important competence turned out to be *Understanding the process of teaching a foreign language*, and competences such as *Classroom management, Ability to motivate pupils* and *Understanding the process of foreign language learning* were estimated to be very important for the profession. One competence with a significant difference between the initial and final result was *Ability to learn through reflective practice*, which is due to constant self-assessment tasks given to students throughout the Teaching Practice Course. (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014).

At the end of the year, the students estimated that all of the competences were developed to a greater extent, with the exception of the competence *Ability to use the ELP*. Students perceived that they significantly developed the competences *Ability to select teaching materials, Ability to motivate students* as well as *Ability to learn by observing others*, which are also aims of the Teaching Practice Course. The only competence which was not developed as expected was the competence *Ability to use the ELP*, while the competences *Detecting pupils' needs* and *Ability to motivate pupils*

were developed to a much higher extent than initially expected. (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014).

During the Teaching Practice course, students are bound to develop many competences needed for the profession, both generic and specific. The research proves that the students developed these competences beyond their expectations, which means that the course is organized appropriately and that it achieves its aims. Thanks to regular analyses and constant self-assessment tasks given to them throughout the course, the students develop the ability to learn through reflective practice to a large extent, which will certainly help them in their further careers as foreign language teachers, since the profession requires constant change and innovation.

However, the only thing which should be changed in the future is the amount of teaching practice. Even though there is a modified part for English language students, it is insufficient. It all comes down to the fact that English language students wait until the fifth year to hold a full 45-minute lesson, which is not ideal for a profession of such kind. However, the overall amount of teaching methodology courses as well as teaching practice for English language students at this faculty is far greater than at some other faculties. For instance, English language students at the Faculty of Teacher Education attend teaching methodology courses and teaching practice from the first until the last year of their study, while English language students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences attend such courses in the fourth and fifth year, and teaching practice only in the fifth year of their study.

The evaluation of the presence of different areas of theory in the professional competence of English teachers was the third part of the questionnaire. **Areas of knowledge** included in this part were: *Practical knowledge of the foreign language*, *Knowledge of foreign language acquisition*, *Knowledge of foreign language teaching methodology*, *Knowledge from the educational sciences* and *Knowledge of the theoretical aspects of a foreign language, literature and culture*. According to the students' perception, *Practical knowledge of the foreign language* turned out to be the most important area of knowledge at the beginning and the end of the year. *Knowledge of language teaching methodology* was estimated second most significant area of knowledge at the end of the year, which is the result of gaining experience of teaching in the classroom. Moreover, they estimated that the *Knowledge of foreign language acquisition* was equally as important. After that came *Knowledge of educational*

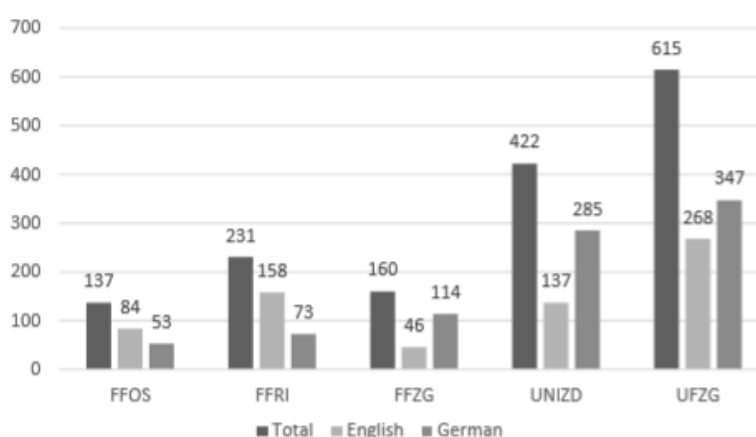
*sciences*, which stayed at the same place at the beginning and the end of the year. Surprisingly, the *Knowledge of theoretical aspects of foreign language, literature and culture* was perceived as least important both in the initial and final measurement. (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2014). This is unexpected since they, as future teachers, have to be prepared for developing and teaching plurilingual and intercultural competence.

## **6.2. Initial education of English language teachers and the development of pupils' plurilingual and intercultural competence – a brief analysis of five programs of study in Croatia**

Foreign language teachers have to face many challenges today, one of them being the development of pupils' plurilingual and intercultural competence. Plurilingual competence represents 'the ability of an individual to connect all knowledge of languages in his language repertoire and apply adequate strategies in using the knowledge depending on the demands of a particular communication situation' (Knežević, 2015). Intercultural competence could be defined as a 'construct which simultaneously contains linguistic and extra-linguistic elements closely related to cultural aspects' (Petravić, 2016). Teachers are crucial when it comes to applying their knowledge in order to develop these competences during their teaching processes. The question is: does initial teacher education prepare them for it? Research regarding that topic was conducted by Željka Knežević in 2017. Its focus was the analysis of ten programs of study from five faculties in Croatia, five of them being concerned with English language study programs. The faculties which were included in the research were: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka, University of Rijeka (FFRI), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb, University of Zagreb (FFZG), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Osijek, University of Osijek (FFOS), Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zadar, University of Zadar (UNIZD) and the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb (UFZG). The research method used was qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Only obligatory courses of each program were included in the analysis. Moreover, the researcher used each programs' syllabi in order to recognize units of analysis. When it comes to English language programs, the results showed that there were 64 obligatory courses containing at least one of their topics relevant for this research. The

Faculty of Teacher Education (UFZG) counts the highest number of obligatory courses for further analysis (18 courses). On the other hand, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FFZG) took the last place with only 8 obligatory courses (Knežević, 2017). This was expected since the English language program at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb consists of 40, and the program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb of 21 obligatory courses.

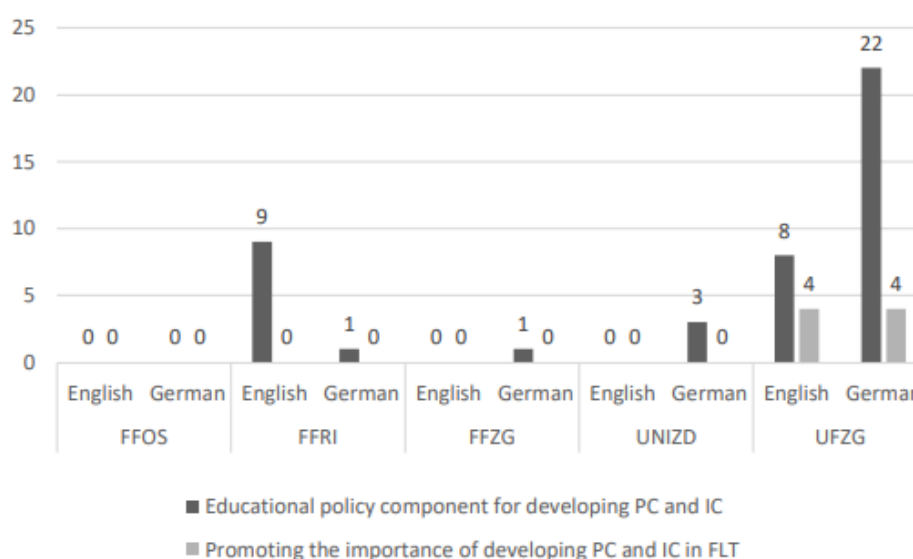
Those 64 mandatory courses isolated for the next step of analysis incorporated 693 units of analysis, i.e. topics. The Faculty of Teacher Education turned out to have the highest number of topics (268). In contrast, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb incorporated a considerably smaller amount of units of analysis, with only 46 topics found in their mandatory courses for English language students (Knežević, 2017).



*Figure 2.* Number of individual topics of particular programs of study presented according to faculties (Knežević, 2017)

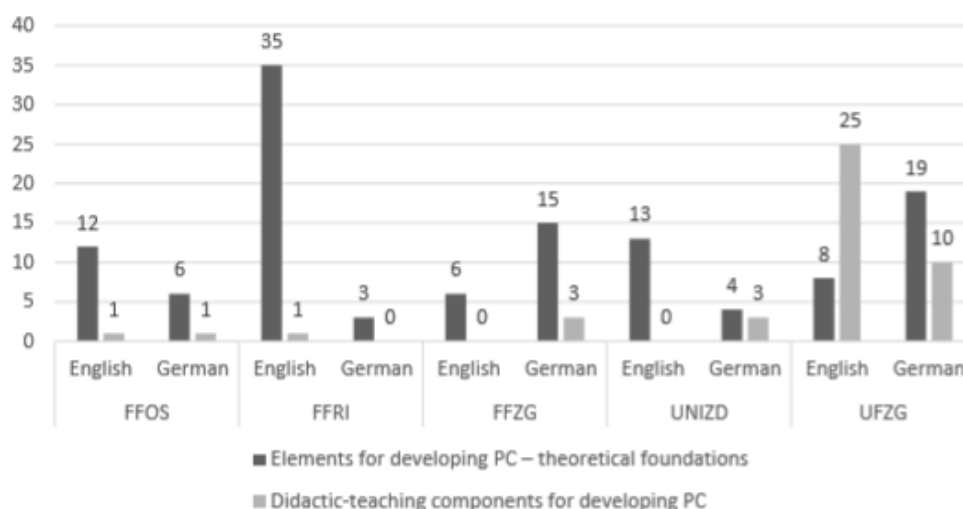
These courses were furthermore analyzed in order to explore the amount of content related to the educational policy component in developing plurilingual competence (PC) and intercultural competence (IC). The results showed that these topics are entirely missing in all the programs of study, except in the programs of study at the Faculty of Teacher Education and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka. These contents are mostly related to documents of the Council of Europe (e.g. CEFR, published in 2001) important for foreign language teaching. Moreover, content which is meant to promote the importance of developing PC and IC in foreign language

teaching was found only at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb (Knežević, 2017).



*Figure 3.* Number of course topics in English and German language programs of study related to the component of educational policy and advocacy for developing PC and IC (Knežević, 2017)

Further analysis of these courses was concerned with the amount of content related to the development of plurilingual competence. Results showed that the English language program of study at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb was the only program of study which consisted of content related to didactic-teaching components for developing PC, while other programs of study relied almost entirely on the theoretical foundations, with some programs of study having none of the content related to didactic-teaching components, such as the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zadar (Knežević, 2017). This could be related to the fact that the program of study at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb has the highest number of courses related to the English language teaching methodology, counting 16 courses which carry 36 ECTS credit points. On the other hand, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and its English language study program counts only 4 courses related to ELT methodology, carrying 12 ECTS points.

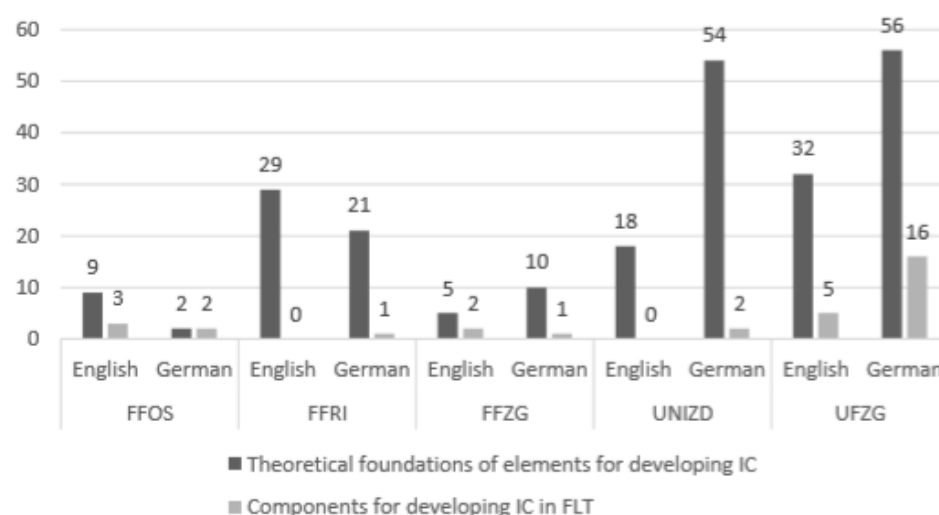


*Figure 4.* Number of course content items in English and German language programs of study relating to the development of PC (Knežević, 2017)

Concerning the theoretical foundations taught at faculties, all programs of study are focused on language acquisition and language mastery with some of the programs touching topics such as learning styles and strategies as well as comparison of linguistic systems. Didactic-teaching components for developing PC were found only in the English language program of study at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb, with a great number of such topics. English language students become familiar with various approaches to early foreign language learning, contemporary glottodidactic concepts for the development of PC (such as Content and language integrated learning - CLIL) as part of many teaching methodology courses, and the integrations of documents of the Council of Europe into teaching (Knežević, 2017).

Regarding content related to the development of intercultural competence, the results showed that the greatest number of course content items related to both theoretical foundations and components of developing IC in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) was found that the Faculty of Teacher Education. Overall, the number of course content items related to theoretical foundations is considerably higher than the number of course content items related to the components for developing IC in foreign language teaching, with some faculties having none of the latter (e.g. the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zadar and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Rijeka) (Knežević, 2017).





*Figure 5.* Number of course content items related to developing IC in English and German language programs of study (Knežević, 2017)

When talking about theoretical foundations of elements for developing IC, all programs of study incorporated content concerning various characteristics connected to the target language. Some programs also dealt with intercultural communication, discussing stereotypes and prejudices. The programs which included content related to components for developing IC in foreign language teaching mostly mentioned ‘manners of mediating culture and civilization of the target language which is only one of the segments for developing IC in teaching’ (Knežević, 2017).

How did this affect teachers who are currently working? What are their views on developing intercultural competence in their classrooms? A research by Olinka Breka and Ana Petravić was conducted concerning these questions. The participants were 105 Croatian teachers of English on a primary school level. Most of them (81.7 %) had more than 5 years of teaching experience, while the other 18.3% that participated had less than 5 years of teaching experience. When it comes to initial education, 47.6 % of participants stated that developing teachers’ intercultural competence was incorporated in their programs of study. Regarding developing learners’ intercultural competence, only 27.6% claimed that this issue was a part of their initial education. However, most of the teachers (69%) participated in various seminars and workshops dealing with developing intercultural competence. The participants were given a questionnaire (Breka & Petravić, 2015).

Within the questionnaire, the participants had to rank statements which described different foreign language teaching objectives on a scale from 1 to 7, 1 meaning most significant and 7 meaning least significant. According to the participants, the most important FL teaching objective turned out to be developing linguistic competence. Right after linguistic competence came developing intercultural competence, which means that the teachers are aware of its importance, even though intercultural competence always includes communicative competence (Byram, 1997). Teachers estimated that learners' curiosity and openness towards different cultures and their interest in the language is of greater significance than cultural knowledge, which tells us that they think that interest and motivation (affective components) are more important than cognitive components. (cf. Mihaljević Djigunović, 1998). Unexpectedly, they also estimated that effective learning strategies and critical thinking are the least significant objectives, which is the opposite of promoting learner autonomy (cf. Elsen & St. John, 2007). Moreover, neglecting critical thinking and the development of learning strategies is a sign of misunderstanding the concept of intercultural competence among teachers (Breka & Petravić, 2015).

Overall, the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb and its English language study program seems to be leading when it comes to the amount of content related to the development of pupils' plurilingual and intercultural competence. The discrepancies between this program and all of the other programs of study are worrying since every initial teacher education should provide students with the same basis of competences.

### **6.3. The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) as a tool for developing teaching competences**

The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) is a tool used for reflection and self-assessment of the skills, competences and didactic knowledge required to teach a language. It is designed for students undergoing initial teacher education by the Council of Europe. Moreover, it also builds on insights from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001) and the European Language Portfolio as well as the European Profile for Language Teacher Education.

The EPOSTL is structured into three parts. The first part is the personal statement section, which helps students to reflect on general questions related to teaching at the

beginning of their teacher education. The second part is the self-assessment section, which incorporates 196 'can-do' descriptors, which encourage the students to reflect and self-assess. Each descriptor is followed by a self-assessment scale, which are colored according to the students' assessment. In order to be more user friendly and coherent, these descriptors are grouped into seven general categories: context, methodology, resources, lesson planning, conducting a lesson, independent learning and assessment of learning.

These categories represent areas in which teachers require various competences. Each category is also divided into sub-topics.

The last part is the dossier, which makes the outcomes of self-assessment transparent, provides evidence of progress and records examples of work relevant to teaching (Newby et al., 2007).

Whether the use of the EPOSTL as a reflection and self-assessment tool is beneficial in practice was explored in an investigation conducted by Ivana Cindrić, Marija Andraka and Milka Bilić-Štefan in 2015. In total, 77 students participated, 36 of them attending the third, 26 students attending the fourth and 15 the fifth year of the Integrated Undergraduate and Graduate University Study for Primary Teacher Education with English. All the students participated in an anonymous survey. The results showed that students attending the third and fourth year of study could not fully recognize the usefulness of the EPOSTL. Moreover, they reported that they could not become more aware of particular issues and had difficulties with identifying areas in which they could improve, especially the students in year 3. This means that teacher trainers should be prepared to discuss the sections, which are of great significance for students, in a descriptive way so that they can expect benefits of their future work. On the other hand, the results showed that students in year 5 showed higher awareness when it comes to the development of teaching competences, which means that they recognize the usefulness of the EPOSTL. The authors suggested some changes in order to improve the effectiveness of this reflection tool such as changing the role of the EPOSTL (placing it in the syllabi), reminding the students of the purpose and target population, dealing with the EPOSTL in smaller parts (section by section), encouraging them to work with the *Glossary of terms* and using the EPOSTL in alternative ways (e.g. using statements

for writing seminar papers and presentations) (Cindrić, Andraka, & Bilić-Štefan, 2015).

## **7. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE INTEGRATED UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE UNIVERSITY STUDY FOR PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION WITH ENGLISH AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE STUDY AT THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

There has been a spark of controversy when it comes to the two programs of study which educate future English teachers, especially regarding the competences provided throughout these programs. Many believe that the English Language and Literature Study at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies is superior to the Integrated Undergraduate and Graduate University Study for Primary Teacher Education with English. However, when comparing these two programs of study, it is clear that this is definitely not the case. Both programs of study last for five years.<sup>5</sup> Further analysis shows that the number of ECTS points at the English Language and Literature Study is 102, while the Integrated Undergraduate and Graduate University Study for Primary Teacher Education with English counts 98 ECTS credit points, which makes a negligible difference. Moreover, English Language students at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FFZG) get awarded 10 ECTS credit points for writing their thesis, while English Language students at the Faculty of Teacher Education (UFZG) achieve 14 ECTS credit points. When taking into consideration the number of ECTS credit points achieved through mandatory courses and writing their thesis, both English Language Students at FFZG and UFZG get awarded 112 ECTS credit points.

On the other hand, the difference between the number of mandatory English courses is significant – English Language students at UFZG have 40 mandatory courses, while English Language students at FFZG have only 21 mandatory courses to complete. Concerning elective courses, English Language students at both programs of study count 3 elective courses, but with a difference in the number of ECTS credit points

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<sup>5</sup> Professor Smiljana Narančić Kovač analyzed these two studies and presented the data in a public discussion on education reform.

(FFZG: 18, UFZG: 5-12). Having that in mind, it is easy to conclude that these two programs of study are the same when it comes to the overall number of ECTS credit points. The difference between them are the numbers of ECTS credit points when it comes to elective courses as well as some mandatory courses at FFZG, which carry more points. In addition, the number of mandatory courses related to English Language Teaching Methodology is greater at UFZG with 16 mandatory courses (36 ECTS credit points) than at FFZG with only 4 mandatory courses (12 ECTS credit points). Furthermore, the number of mandatory courses related to general pedagogy, psychology and didactics in teaching is also greater at UFZG, including 15 courses worth 41 ECTS credit points. On the other hand, at FFZG there are only 3 mandatory courses related to this, counting 18 ECTS credit points. When taking into consideration the percentage of ECTS credit points of mandatory courses related to English Language Teaching Methodology in regard to the total number of mandatory courses, it is evident that UFZG takes the lead with 36,7 %, while FFZG follows up with 11,7 %.

	UFZG	FFZG
<b>Number of mandatory English courses</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>21</b>
Number of elective courses	3	3
Number of mandatory courses related to ELT Methodology	16	4
Number of mandatory courses related to general pedagogy, psychology and didactics in teaching	15	3
Number of ECTS points	98	102
Thesis	14	10
<b>Number of ECTS points in total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>112</b>

*Table 1.* Number of courses and ECTS points at UFZG and FFZG

To sum up, the Integrated Undergraduate and Graduate University Study for Primary Teacher Education with English is more focused on developing general pedagogic competences as well as English Teaching Methodology, narrowly specializing future teachers in teaching primary school students, both lower (1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> grade) and upper primary level (5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>). On the other hand, the English Language and Literature Study is more concerned with teaching English on a wider scale when it comes to various age groups and context. While these study programs do not differentiate when it comes to courses concerned with communicative competence, they do differentiate when it comes to content concerning culture, literature and teaching methodology. English Language students at UFZG are more focused on teaching English to young learners, and are specialized to do it in a way that will be age-appropriate and interesting for them. However, that is not the case with English Language students at FFZG, with them having more of a general focus on that matter. For example, students at FFZG are concerned with the history of English literature and do not take children's literature into consideration at all, while students at UFZG only study literature with an emphasis on children's literature, youth literature and picturebooks.

## **8. ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES THROUGHOUT TEACHERS' CAREERS**

Developing professional competences is an important part of the teaching expertise. In many European countries or regions, further professional development is perceived as professional duty. However, the number of opportunities that teacher actually get when it gets to professional development seems to be insufficient when taking into consideration the teachers' need for it. In order to be able to develop their competences, teachers need to be viewed as lifelong learners who require individualized training, which consists of feedback about their teaching as well as assessment of their specific learning needs. Unfortunately, many teachers estimate that they do not receive enough feedback on their teaching, most of them being young teachers (e.g. 55% of young teachers did not receive feedback in Italy). On the other hand, there are some countries in which teachers receive regular feedback on their teaching performance, such as Bulgaria, the Slovak Republic and Lithuania. For the professional development to be effective, collaborative continuous professional development is considered to be the right way to do it, since it is focused on developing positive change in attitudes, beliefs

and the teacher's practice in general, as well as changes when it comes to pupils such as their attitudes and behavior (European Commission, 2013).

Teachers' professional development directly impacts the development of learners' potential. Therefore, teachers need to possess competences which would help them in completing that aim. Maintaining and developing professional competences throughout their careers is essential when it comes to that. Teacher education systems need to provide effective ways to further develop their professional competences. One way of doing it is stimulating active engagement while taking into consideration that every teacher is different when it comes to their learning styles, extent of engagement and their outlook on the benefits of further development of their competences. Accordingly, some teachers may be more stimulated by external factors, and others by internal. Opportunities for further development of competences should match needs and demands of the teachers, the school and the education system. There should be various opportunities provided and adequate provision of resources and time (European Commission, 2013).

Teachers who are more stimulated by external factors may be more likely to fulfill other roles in school, to be recognized by education authorities, to gain respect of the local community as well as have a higher salary.

Another way of developing teachers' competences is assessing their development, which needs to be based upon some kind of a framework, such as the national framework of teacher competences. A competence assessment system should incorporate some key choices, such as:

- a choice of focus on the individual, the school or the system;
- the relationship between assessment systems and the quality assurance system;
- whether the assessment system will concentrate on:
  - supporting teachers' development (formative - on a continuous basis), or
  - on monitoring their progress (summative – possibly, with the recognition of a higher
  - competence level, or decisions on salaries/ new roles); and
- whether it will focus on the process or the outcome of competence development (European Commission, 2013, p.36)

Various tools and techniques are being used in competence assessment systems. The two main kind of tools and techniques are formative and summative. Formative assessment tools include self-assessment, reviews of competences on meetings with principal, classroom observation by peers, video analysis, portfolios, action research and so on. Summative assessment tools and techniques include micro teaching, examinations, essays, testing, video and so on.

The basis of professional competences should be provided to all student teachers throughout their initial teacher education, which could be of great importance when it comes to further development throughout their careers. Teachers who are just beginning to teach should be provided a systematic program of support so they could have the chance to start the further development of these competences. Moreover, after this program of support is over, it is crucial for teachers to stay motivated to engage in a continuous process of assessing and developing their competences further (European Commission, 2013).

## **9. CONCLUSION**

Students, future teachers, are required to recognize the importance of competences and develop them throughout their initial teacher education, as well as throughout their further professional development. Every teacher needs to fulfill a minimum, and that minimum is having specialist knowledge of the subject that they are teaching and possessing the fundamental pedagogical skills to teach. Both of these requirements are applied to foreign language teaching. Furthermore, both are equally important and cannot go one without the other, especially in the context of teaching young learners, for which it is crucial to know how to appropriately pass on the knowledge of a foreign language, taking into consideration the learners' age and possibilities.

A crucial element of initial teacher education is teaching practice, supervised by a mentor. Through teaching practice, students are provided feedback which helps them in developing their competences, since experience is one of the most effective ways of doing that. However, when comparing initial teacher education on a global scale, taking part in teaching practice in order to work in schools is not a requirement in every country. Furthermore, not every country provides specialized training for teaching



specific age groups and subjects, which raises the question of whether there should be a standard for teaching a foreign language on a global level.

When it comes to defining competences, examples from around Europe have been discussed in this thesis. Countries differentiate in many factors, one of them being the level of detail when describing competences. Some countries provide general guidelines (such as methodological competences) required for teaching as recommendations for initial teacher education, e.g. Croatia, Finland, Spain and Cyprus. On the other hand, precise lists of specific competences are present in a few countries (Belgium, Estonia, the UK, the Netherlands). Besides the level of detail, whether the competence descriptions are only for initial teacher education or further professional development and the policy tools used are also factors in which countries vary. Defining competences that teachers are required to possess would be an appropriate solution in order to create a universal standard.

In Croatia, a booklet called *Competences of Primary School Foreign Language Teachers in the Republic of Croatia* provides descriptions of required competences for foreign language teachers in primary schools. Furthermore, it provides a systemic overview of competences which foreign language teachers should acquire and professionally develop throughout their careers. This booklet is an excellent way of establishing a standard on a national level, which helps both institutions as well as teachers when it comes to giving an insight into competences.

There are two ways of attaining a qualification for an English teacher in Croatia: a) completing the English language study program at the Faculty of Teacher Education b) completing the English language study program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The main difference between these two ways is that student-teachers at the Faculty of Teacher Education are specialized for teaching a foreign language in the context of young learners (primary school) and are provided a significantly greater amount of Teaching Practice, teaching methodology courses, courses concerned with culture, courses concerned with children's literature and courses related to general pedagogy, psychology and didactics in teaching. When it comes to courses regarding communicative competence, these study programs do not differentiate. Students at both faculties get awarded 112 ECTS credit points by attending mandatory courses and writing their thesis. Therefore, the programs are the same regarding the overall number of ECTS credit points. However, there is a difference concerning the number

of mandatory courses. Students at the Faculty of Teacher Education have 40 mandatory courses, while students the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences have 21 mandatory courses.

As previously mentioned, the study program at the Faculty of Teacher Education contains courses specialized for teaching a foreign language to young learners, which especially develop students' specific competences for working with learners at primary school level. Moreover, since this study program also prepares them to be generalist teachers, the study program is also focused on developing comprehensive teaching competences, which makes these future teachers fully prepared for working with children in general, not just in the context of foreign language teaching. Such differences between the English language study programs at UFZG and FFZG, concerning future teachers' development of competences for teaching a foreign language to young learners, should be minimized because every student-teacher needs to be provided with the same basis of competences throughout initial teacher education, so that they could recognize the importance of developing those competences throughout their careers in order to be successful language teachers at the primary school level. Nevertheless, that does not mean that these programs need to be identical. Each program has different aims. However, the perception that one program is better than the other (and vice versa) is quite common, even in part of the community of experts. Changing this perception is a difficult task, but it should be done.

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## **IZJAVA O SAMOSTALNOJ IZRADI RADA**

Izjavljujem da sam samostalno izradila završni rad pod nazivom *Developing teaching competences of primary EFL students – a review of literature* u akademskoj godini 2019./2020.

potpis:



## **IZJAVA O JAVNOJ OBJAVI RADA**

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