

# Emotions in the classroom-comparison between online and in person learning

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**Master's thesis / Diplomski rad**

**2022**

*Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj:* **University of Zagreb, Faculty of Teacher Education / Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Učiteljski fakultet**

*Permanent link / Trajna poveznica:* <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:147:079065>

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-11-20**

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

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DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**EMOTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM –  
COMPARISON BETWEEN ONLINE  
AND IN PERSON LEARNING**

**Zagreb, lipanj 2022.**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

Ime i prezime pristupnika: Marija Magdalena Sever

TEMA DIPLOMSKOG RADA: EMOTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM –  
COMPARISON BETWEEN ONLINE AND IN-PERSON LEARNING

MENTOR: izv. prof. dr. sc. Kristina Cergol

**Zagreb, lipanj 2022.**

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## **SAŽETAK**

U okolnostima zatvaranja škola zbog pokušaja zaustavljanja širenja Covid-19 virusa, nastava na daljinu bila je izazov za sve dionike obrazovnog procesa – učenike, učitelje i roditelje. Cilj je istraživanja bio utvrditi iskustva i mišljenja učenika prvog obrazovnog ciklusa (konkretno, 4. razred) o nastavi na daljinu te ih potaknuti da usporede svoje emocije i doživljaje nastave uživo u odnosu na nastavu na daljinu.

Ispitivanje je provedeno na uzorku od devetnaest učenika 4. razreda jedne osnovne škole u Velikoj Gorici. Podaci su prikupljeni provedbom polu-strukturiranog intervjua u četiri skupine. Istraživanje je provedeno u 4. mjesecu 2021. godine, u vremenu kada su učenici pohađali nastavu kontaktno. Pitanja su bila otvorenog i zatvorenog tipa.

Učenici navode pozitivne i negativne emocije vezane uz online nastavu, ali negativne emocije prevladavaju. Jedna od prednosti koju su učenici ponovili više puta jest više slobodnog vremena kada bi nastava trebala biti ujutro i općenito više vremena provedenog kod kuće. Najčešće ponovljeni nedostatak su puno veće količine zadaće, odnosno zadataka koje su morali sami ispuniti bez prethodnog objašnjenja. Većina učenika navodi roditelje kao najveći izvor pomoći u razdoblju online učenja i učiteljicu kao dodatnu pomoć ako roditelji nešto nisu znali.

U radu se također uspoređuje učenje i poučavanje engleskog jezika u okolnostima online nastave i razlike istog u odnosu na kontaktno učenje kada profesorica engleskog mora nositi masku. S obzirom da pandemija još nije gotova u vrijeme pisanja ovog diplomskog rada, iznesena iskustva bi mogla poslužiti kao korisne smjernice u daljnjoj organizaciji nastave na daljinu ili mješovitog oblika nastave.

Ključne riječi: emocije u nastavi, kontaktna nastava, nastava na daljinu, nastava engleskog jezika

## **ABSTRACT**

In circumstances of schools shutting down in an attempt to stop the spread of Covid-19, distance learning has posed a challenge for all participants in the educational system – students/pupils, teachers and parents. The aim of this research was to determine experiences and opinions of lower primary pupils (specifically, 4th grade) on online learning and encourage them to compare their emotions and experiences of in person learning in relation to distance learning.

The survey was conducted on a sample of nineteen 4th grade students from an elementary school in Velika Gorica. Data was collected by conducting a semi-structured interview in four groups. The research was conducted in April of 2021, at the time when students attended classes in person. There were open and closed types of questions.

Students listed positive and negative emotions related to online learning with negative emotions predominating. One of the benefits that students have repeated many times is more free time when classes should have been in the morning and generally more time spent at home. The most common recurring shortcomings are greater amount of tasks, that is tasks that they had to complete on their own without prior instruction. Most pupils list parents as the biggest source of help in the online learning period and the teacher as extra help if the parents did not know something.

In this paper we also compare learning and teaching English in the circumstances of online learning and its differences in relation to in person learning with the English teacher wearing a mask. Since the pandemic is not over at the time of writing this thesis, the presented experiences could serve as useful guidelines in further organization of hybrid online and in person learning.

Key words: emotions in learning, in person learning, online learning, English language learning

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

During the Covid-19 pandemic a lot has changed and a rather new means of class delivery in Croatia was online or remote learning. Online learning has only partially been used before Covid-19 hit. The difference this time was that everybody had to adjust to it, and not just the people who had previously used it. Having little to no experience in the field of online teaching and learning, many teachers and students found themselves in an uncomfortable position. Both teachers and students had to be patient with one another while trying to learn how to learn via television, and the internet.

In this paper, we study young pupils in fourth grade who were in the third grade when the pandemic started. They had had two and a half years of traditional, in person schooling prior to the pandemic. From March 2020 until the end of their third grade in June 2020 they attended their classes remotely, online. Once they were in the fourth grade, they returned to the classroom.

Even though they were back in school, not everything was back to normal. Different schools had different rules for Covid-19 measures regarding who can come into the school and who has to wear a mask in school. When this research was conducted, lower-primary school pupils and their class teachers did not have to wear masks, but teachers of religious education, English, and German had to wear masks when coming into the classrooms because they met many students throughout the day and were said to be more likely to spread the virus. Students could not leave their classroom during the breaks but could only play inside the classroom. At the time of this research, the length of classes was 40 minutes, and not 45 minutes which is normal for Croatian schooling system. The idea behind the 40-minute classes is to have 5 extra minutes between lessons to air out the classroom and disinfect it.

This study focuses on emotions and attitudes of lower primary school students whose schooling was largely affected by Covid-19 and the changes this pandemic brought.

## **2 EMOTIONS IN LEARNING**

The APA Dictionary of Psychology (American Psychological Association, n.d.) describes emotion as “a complex reaction pattern, involving experiential, behavioral, and physiological elements, by which an individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event.” They are caused by a situation happening either on the inside or the outside of the person. Emotions can be pleasant/positive or unpleasant/negative (Furlan, Kljajić, Kolesarić, Krizmanić, Szabo, Šverko, 2005). For the purposes of this paper, the terms “positive emotions” and “pleasant emotions” will be used interchangeably. The same goes for unpleasant and negative emotions.

In essence, schooling is based on enculturalization processes, in which what is believed and valued within and among cultures is played out and re-enacted in ritualized activity settings (Schutz, DeCuir, 2002). Emotions affect how learning takes place, how we perform and what is learned (Novick, Kress and Elias, 2002). Park (2016) argues that children are deprived of the right to maximize their learning potential when emotions are ignored, and teachers are deprived of a vital tool that may help them fulfil their obligations more successfully.

### **2.1 NEGATIVE EMOTIONS**

Negative emotions are crucial in the calibration of psychological processes, acting as a signal for mental or behavioral modification (Cacciopo and Gardner, 1999). They help us realise something is wrong, and we then act accordingly. APA Dictionary of Psychology (American Psychological Association, n.d.) describes them as “unpleasant, often disruptive, emotional reaction(s) designed to express a negative affect.” In the 1970s, psychologist Paul Eckman pointed out six basic emotions, four of which are negative (sadness, anger, fear and disgust) and two are positive emotions (happiness, surprise). There are also complex negative emotions, such as anxiety, low self-esteem, guilt, jealousy, and envy (Cherry, 2021).

Pekrun, Goetz, Titz and Perry (2002) found that academic emotions (joy, enthusiasm, hope, relief, pride, gratitude, admiration, sadness, anger, anxiety, hopelessness, shame, guilt, disappointment, boredom, envy, contempt, surprise) are intertwined with students' self-perceptions of academic competence and control, the values and objectives they associate with learning and achievement, and classroom instruction and social contexts that influence control, values, and goals. Negative emotions may



also be caused by the difficulty of the task the students are given. Students who see a learning situation as "uncontrollable" are more likely to focus on their emotions and desire to work through their feelings before continuing with the learning task (Boekaerts, 2007). Different people have different ways of dealing with their emotions, and the same goes for the students. Graham, Hudley, and Williams (1992) suggest that some students have the inner power to bear and hide negative emotions while attempting to mentally picture an uncertain scenario and devise a plan of action. On the other hand, students who want to attain a performance goal are not as ready to tolerate negative emotions that come with the difficulty of the task and are usually not ready to admit the task is too demanding. Boekaerts (2007) also suggests that a proper balance of positive and negative emotions is useful for classroom learning. Since not all learning activities are fun, the students might sometimes feel trapped by the teacher or their friends in the learning activities they do not want to participate in. Mild negative emotions in the context of optimism may be linked to doing the bare minimum in different learning situations which the students do not find optimal (Boekaerts, 2007). Furthermore, "anger, anxiety, and shame can undermine intrinsic motivation, but can induce strong extrinsic motivation to invest effort to avoid failure", but for most students, the negative effects of negative emotions experienced in the learning process are likely to outweigh any positive outcomes in academic performance (Pekrun, Goetz, Frenzel, Barchfeld, Perry, 2011).

Negative emotions are associated with symptoms of depression across gender and age (Willroth, Flett, Mauss, 2019). According to McGuire (1998), first symptoms of depression occur in children as young as fifteen, while in the past, people could expect first symptoms around the age of thirty. At some point in their lives, 15-20% of Americans experience a severe and about 50% milder form of depression (Saroyan, 1998). Research done by Bezinović (2000) shows that the situation is not very different in Croatia. In a sample of 3082 high school students, 5.7% of girls, and 2.3% of boys showed signs of an existential crisis connected to depressive states. They feel a sense of worthlessness, meaninglessness of life, not belonging anywhere, boredom, anxiety and sadness. These emotions are often connected to suicidal thoughts. Even though there could be multiple different reasons for these emotions, some of them can definitely be linked to school (Miljković, Rijavec, 2009).

### **2.1.1. RELEVANCE OF RECOGNIZING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS AND REACTING TO THEM**

Let us say a teacher is fully aware of the effects that emotions have on learning. How would they go about recognizing different emotions and reacting to them? Positive emotions are always welcome, but the negative ones can be intimidating. The right reaction would be, rather than seeing negative emotions as obstacles, to see them as a part of the process for problem solving, as the first sign that something is wrong (Novick et al., 2002). Schutz and DeCuir (2002) argue that a classroom can be, and usually is, “an intensely emotional place” and, referring to a number of authors, point out that “an important aspect of emotion episodes is that they are socially constructed and emerge from particular social-historical contexts.” They mention an example given in a study by DeCuir-Gunby and Williams (2007) who describe how some students had significant emotional episodes such as guilt, anger, and sadness after attending an assembly featuring a local civil rights leader. One student characterized her friend as "upset and crying." She was sad because she believed he [the assembly speaker] was accusing her of being a bad person merely because she was "white." The student got sad because of an environmental transaction and her own social-historical context (being “white”). Environmental transaction being in this case a civil rights leader’s speech, but generally an interaction between an individual and their social or physical environment (American Psychological Association, n.d.). If only one of these two factors had been different, the student would not have felt the way she did.

According to Ainley (2007) emotions should be differentiated from moods. She notes that moods are different from emotions by the length of time they last; emotions are temporary states, but moods are feelings that last longer. Unlike moods, emotions have specific triggers, and when you understand the trigger for some behaviour, you can deal with the consequence – an emotion. Recognizing and dealing with emotions the right way is crucial for educational settings because negative emotions (such as fear, anger, and sadness) limit an individual's immediate thought-action repertoire to certain activities.

### **2.2 POSITIVE EMOTIONS**

Positive emotions (e.g., joy, interest, and contentment), on the other hand, broaden an individual's immediate thought-action repertoire (Fredricksan, 2000 in Ainley, 2000). The focus on emotions in learning exists because a great amount of literature shows

that people's emotions are influenced by the substance of their cognitions, motives, and actions, as well as the manner in which they act and process information, as a result of their experiences (Boekaerts, 2007). Pekrun et al. (2002) state that emotions are key components of self-regulated learning in students, such as interest, motivation, learning strategies, and internal regulation of learning. They also predict students' academic success (ibid.). It is necessary to consider students' emotions to get a fair picture of their self-control and academic achievement. Therefore, if you are helping a child deal with their emotions, you are also setting them up for success in academic settings which abound with achievement emotions such as delight in learning, optimism, pride, anger, fear, guilt, hopelessness, or boredom (Schutz and Pekrun, 2007). Achievement emotions are not only present in class, but also at home when the students are studying, and especially when they are taking exams and tests (Pekrun et al., 2011). It is important to bear in mind that positive emotions should not be desired because of their effect on learning and memory, but because they are generally good for the individual (Cergol, 2020).

Positive activating emotions like enjoyment, optimism, and pride are considered to boost intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, allow the use of flexible learning techniques, and assist self-regulation, all of which are expected to improve academic performance under most circumstances (Pekrun et al., 2011). According to Ryan and Deci (2000) “children and adolescents who are attracted to a learning activity for the sake of experiencing the positive feelings of progress and competence that it generates are intrinsically motivated”, and it is well known that intrinsic motivation is more than welcome in education as well as in any other area of life.

If you are in danger, or hurt, negative emotions will tell you to get away or help yourself somehow. While negative emotions are here to help us adapt, and survive, the role of positive emotions is not as clear. The question can be asked, why did positive emotions survive evolution if they are not specifically here to help us survive? Some claim that positive emotions are a sign of health and well-being (Diener, 2000). Others think that positive emotions help us come closer to something good, as opposed to moving away from something dangerous that could hurt us. Still, there is not a clear answer to this question (Miljković, Rijavec, 2009).

Barbara L. Fredrickson tried answering questions related to positive emotions and came up with “Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions” (Fredrickson, 2009). According to her theory, positive emotions have the following roles: a) to expand our repertoire of opinions and behaviours; b) to build a psychological repertoire for the future; c) to cancel out harmful effects of negative emotions; d) to invoke an upward development spiral (Figure 1).

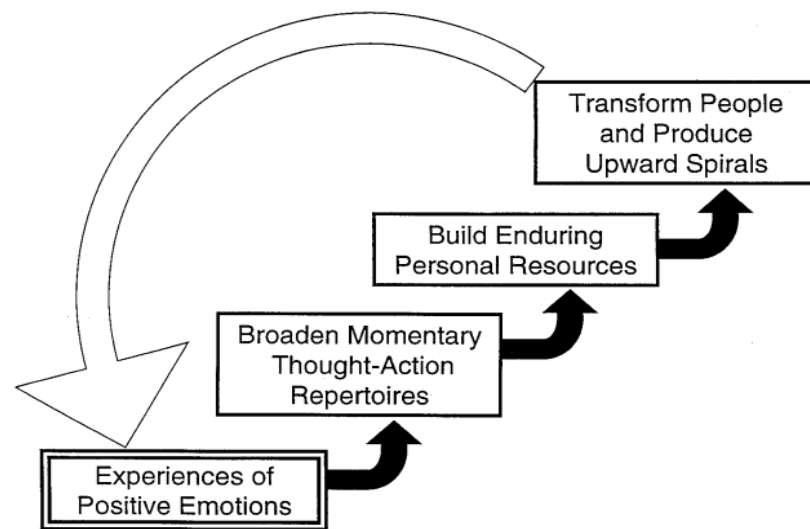


Figure 1. The broaden-and build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2009)

Just like negative emotions can cause us to “spiral down” into depression, positive emotions can induce an “upward spiral”, which then leads to better emotional well-being and personal growth and development. The upward spiral of positive emotions (Figure 1) is a process by which experiencing positive emotions changes people for the better (Fredrickson, 2009). Barbara Fredrickson did more research on this topic and the hypothesis of her theory was always confirmed. Inducing positive emotions broadens attention and allows respondents to see the whole picture of events (Fredrickson and Branigan, 2005). Furthermore, “positive emotions shorten the duration of cardio-vascular arousal produced by negative emotions” (Fredrickson and Levenson, 1998). Some other results of positive emotions are better cognitive activity, success, greater altruism, and better health (Miljković, Rijavec, 2009).

Rijavec (2015) writes about positive psychology and well-being (happiness) as key criteria for good functioning, which is often seen as a life goal to be pursued. According to research on this subject, happiness delivers highly desirable life advantages, such as greater health, longer life, successful relationships, and better

work performance. Rijavec claims that the most essential reasons for teaching happiness in schools are frequent reports of depression among young people, the limited growth in life satisfaction in the previous half-century, poor student satisfaction with education in many countries, and the synergy between learning and positive emotion. Several studies show that school-based positive psychology programmes are successful in enhancing positive traits and well-being. Even though in some studies the relationship between happiness and these outcomes has yet to be clearly shown, there is a correlation between happiness and life benefits that cannot be denied (ibid.).

### **3 FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN CROATIA**

Since 2003, all Croatian primary schools have required students to learn one foreign language starting from the first grade. Students have several options, for example English, German, Italian, French, Spanish, and others (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Parents often choose English as the first foreign language which means the children learn it from the first grade when they are seven years old. Still, there are schools that offer German or other languages as the first language (ibid.).

The English Language Curriculum (2019), a document issued by the Ministry of Science and Education, offers instruction on what should be learned and acquired at which grade level. It was written for all grade levels, first to eight grade of primary school, and four years of high school. The Curriculum is divided into three main competences – communicative language competence, independence in language learning and intercultural language competence. According to the Curriculum, these three competences should be equally accomplished at all grade levels. Each competence has certain outcomes that need to be met, the explanation of each outcome, and the level of knowledge pupils should acquire in order to get the grade “3”. Grades in Croatian school system go from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest, and equivalent to failing, and 5 being the highest grade. Since the only concrete grading explanation the Curriculum gives is for the grade “3”, the teachers usually come up with their own criteria for lower and higher grades.

According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, at the end of the school year 2019/2020, 69,7% of students studied English in primary school, either as their first or second language, 23,5% of students studied German, and 5,7% studied Italian. Since two predominant foreign languages in Croatia are English and German, they are often

compared. Research has shown that young students (lower primary) in Croatia, who study these two languages, wish to gain more communicative skills in English than in German, which then affects their motivation to study the German language (Karlak and Šimić, 2017). Students' motivation for studying English is higher than their motivation for studying German (ibid.).

Knežević and Šenjug Golub (2015) conducted research on parents of lower primary pupils and their attitudes towards learning foreign languages, their understanding of multilingualism, their beliefs on the importance certain languages have for their children, and their beliefs on the order and the number of foreign languages the students should learn in public education. They discovered that parents generally have a positive attitude towards learning foreign languages and they see multilingualism as an ability to speak and use multiple languages. Parents with higher education degrees have a more positive attitude towards foreign language learning. The researchers attributed that finding to the educated parent's more extensive experience of how important foreign languages are. As for the order in which the languages should be learned, only 2.5% of the participating parents think that the pupils should first learn German and then English.

#### **4 EMOTIONS AND MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Both positive and negative emotions are linked to language learning, and these emotions are very important when it comes to language learning and achievement (Shao, Pekrun, and Nicholson, 2019). While negative emotions in second language acquisition have been heavily focused on (particularly language anxiety) in the past (Teimouri, Goetze, and Plonsky, 2019), there is now a move toward examining positive emotions (enjoyment, happiness, gratitude, pride, joy, hope, admiration), and the positive effects of negative emotions in second language learning (Shao, Nicholson, Kutuk, and Lei, 2020).

Shao et al. (2020) write about positive psychology and its effects on learning. They refer to Gable and Haidt (2005) when giving a definition of positive psychology and state that it is a "scientific study that aims to better understand the conditions and processes involved in the flourishing or optimal functioning of groups and individuals." In positive psychology, positive emotions are viewed not just as a method to achieve psychological growth, intellectual development, and greater well-being

through time, but also as a means to thrive and experience pleasure (Fredrickson, 2001). This shows that they are worth fostering and may play a key part in second language acquisition, which is a long-term process requiring persistence, drive, curiosity, perseverance, and optimism, among other things (MacIntyre, Gregersen, Mercer, 2019). Positive psychology is recognised as an exciting topic to include in the study of emotions and second language acquisition because it encompasses aspects such as positive institutions (e.g., school and family), positive characteristics (e.g., virtues and strengths), and positive emotions (e.g., happiness, joy, hope), all of which are crucial to the investigation and cultivation of beneficial affective experiences in language classrooms (Shao et al., 2020).

Gardner (1985) identified four factors that influence motivation in second language acquisition: “goal, effortful behaviour to reach the goal, a desire to attain the goal and positive attitudes towards the goal.” Having a specific goal in mind helps to enhance motivation in all the mentioned areas. Gardner (1985) discovered two factors that may boost motivation in second language acquisition, which he subsequently defined as orientations. The first one is integrative orientation, and it is defined as a positive attitude towards the community of the language being studied, as well as the desire to socially integrate and adapt while speaking the community's language. The instrumental orientation is the second orientation which indicates that a person is driven to learn a language for personal reasons, such as work advancement or moving to another country. Dörnyei, Németh, and Cziér (2006) classified the two orientations as follows: instrumentality (personal benefits of learning the second language), integrativeness (a positive attitude toward the second language and its culture), attitudes toward the language speakers/community, milieu (social influences from the close learning environment), vitality of the community speaking that language (particular ethnic group's distinctiveness as a collective entity), linguistic self-confidence, and cultural interest.

Language learning can be specific from the perspective of young learners because there is no immediate need to use English and therefore, usually, no real motivation to learn it (Tomlinson, 2015). The term *young learners* usually refers to primary school pupils between the ages of seven to twelve (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012). In some situations, students older than twelve can be referred to as *young students*, depending on different practices in introducing children to a foreign language (ibid.). In this work,

we will be referring to primary school learners between the ages of seven to twelve as young learners. Since an immediate need or a strong desire to learn a foreign language is key in acquiring it successfully, it is important to evoke that sensation in young learners using different techniques and learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). Learning can only be achieved if the experience of learning is positive and enjoyable and if it helps increase the learners' confidence and self-esteem (Tomlinson, 2015).

Attitudes and motivation are two different learning factors but are inter-related. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) define language attitudes as positive and negative feelings about a language, and Gardner (2010) defines motivation as a combination of wanting to learn the language, positive attitudes towards it and the efforts put into learning it (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2012). Some studies point to parents, siblings, friends, and teachers of young learners as being a big influence in learner's attitudes (Low, Brown, Johnstone, Pirrie, 1995; Nikolov, 2002; Szpotowicz, Mihaljević Djigunović, Enever, 2009), but Vilke (1979) found that this influence sometimes goes in the opposite direction. It was found in her study that new learners develop their attitudes once they acquire their own experiences in foreign language learning. The teacher, as mentioned, is crucial for both attitude formation and maintaining motivation (Vilke, 1993).

Dörnyei (1998) concludes that motivation is a multifaceted factor and that there is no theory to represent its total complexity. He warns that when it comes to conceptualizing and analysing motivation factors, researchers must be very cautious, and they must be aware that the motivation measure or notion they are concentrating on is likely to be merely a portion of a larger psychological construct.

Mihaljević Djigunović (2012) offers an overview of three projects (The Pécs project, 1977-1995; The Zagreb project, 1991-2001; The Early Language Learning in Europe (ELLiE) project, 2006-2010). From them, she draws a conclusion that "young FL learner attitudes and motivation are phenomena that have a distinct nature and require a specific approach." She suggests an approach which "secures structure and guidance, gives enough space for concentration during activities, and provides learners with as much teacher attention as they need." (ibid.). One of the things these studies helped with was positive attitudes and motivation to be considered as an outcome of foreign language achievement instead of seeing them as a cause of early learning. Another



thing that is pointed out and should be kept in mind by researchers and language teachers is that motivation and attitudes change with learner's age. Teachers should know this so that they can be aware of changes in learner's motivation over time and may be prepared to maintain it with different and appropriate motivational teaching strategies (ibid.).

In 2007, Mihaljević Djigunović conducted research with an aim to investigate “the role of individual differences in affective learner factors among Croatian English language learners.” Affective learner factors that were looked into were attitudes towards the English language, attitudes towards learning and teaching English, language learning motivation, language anxiety, self-perception and aspirations. There was an assumption that emotional and biological changes at the time of puberty play an important role in the affective profile of primary school learners. It was found that secondary school learners have a more positive affective profile than the primary school learners, and that female learners have a more positive affective profile than male learners. The differences in male and female learners were greater in primary school students. Pupils from urban primary schools had a much more positive affective profile than their peers in rural schools. This study indicated that the relationship between learners' affective factors and their success in learning English is very significant.

## **5 ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

In March 2020, measures were taken in trying to stop Covid-19 from spreading. All schools in Croatia closed on March 16, 2020 (Vlada RH, 2020). UNESCO reported that 91% of educational institutions worldwide were closed by the end of March. This situation put massive stress on all participants of the school system – lower (Frangež, 2021) and higher-grade students (Runtić and Kavelj, 2020), teachers and principals (Sorić, Burić, Penezić, 2021).

When it came to the full lockdown, schools switched to different ways of remote teaching without sufficient preparations or meeting necessary prerequisites: having the right equipment, a fast internet connection, the ability to make the right teaching materials and educator competencies (Runtić and Kavelj, 2020). Fauzi and Sastra Khusuma (2020) say that the biggest difficulties teachers noticed in remote learning

were availability of gadgets, use of network and the internet, planning, implementation and evaluation of learning, and cooperation with parents.

Teachers were facing new challenges during this time. According to Klimova (2021), teachers acquire four different roles in the process of online teaching: pedagogical and intellectual role, social role, technical role, managerial and organizational role (Figure 2). Klimova (2021) especially points out how difficult it is to teach a foreign language online. Teachers have to modify the materials which can be quite time-consuming, and there is often a lack of students' motivation and engagement. If, in addition to this, students are hesitant to switch on their cameras, and teachers are left facing black screens on the computer. This makes teachers' work uncomfortable. The topic of silence behind the screen was interesting to some authors even before Covid-19 hit. One of these authors is Ursula Stickler, and in her paper from 2019 she provides an overview of different types of silences that can occur in online learning and compares them to silences in classroom learning.

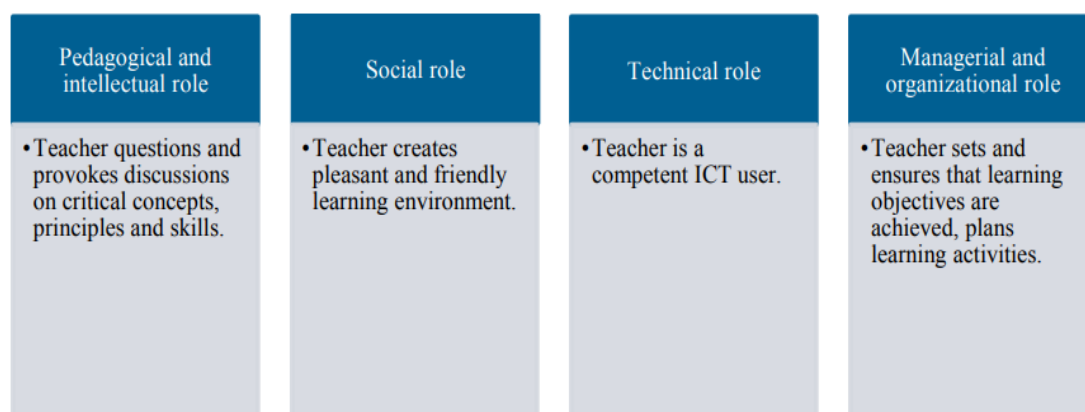


Figure 2. An overview of the teacher's role in the online teaching process (Klimova, 2021)

Research done by the British Council (2020) in 150 countries offered a more detailed description of difficulties from the perspective of educators, highlighting the following challenges: maintaining student motivation, classroom management, inclusion of individuals from marginalized groups, concern for different abilities of students, well-being of students and teachers, poor internet connection or inability to access the internet, lack of equipment for teachers and students, preparing students for exams, fear of cheating, developing student autonomy in learning, planning online lessons, designing assignments for remote teaching and the longer time required for preparation

(ibid.). There are many difficulties mentioned, which is why Huang, Liu, Tlili, Yang, and Wang (2020) identified seven criteria essential for the effectiveness of online learning in avoiding potential obstacles: reliable communication infrastructure, appropriate digital learning resources, appropriate learning tools, effective learning methods, teaching organization of learning, effective support services for teachers and students, close cooperation between governments, businesses and schools (ibid.).

In research conducted by Sense, van der Velde, Spijkers, Meeter, and van Rijn (2021), it was shown that during the Covid-19 lockdown in spring 2020, students in Dutch secondary schools increased their use of an online retrieval practice program<sup>1</sup>, with engagement peaking on weekday mornings in particular. They found minimal indication of severe study delays as a result of the lockdown; students on the highest educational track were likely to be on or even slightly ahead of schedule from the previous year, and students on the lower track were also generally on time with their assignments. During the lockdown, students' learning performance was better than the previous year. In open answer questions, they noticed higher accuracy and quicker reaction times, possibly indicating that students were under less pressure or were better able to focus at home. Access to appropriate digital educational materials and online learning tools was not the same for all students in the Netherlands, and it was found to vary depending on socioeconomic factors, teachers' familiarity and experience with these resources, and, in secondary education, students' previous knowledge and grades (ibid.). Because of the differences in educational systems, access to education and technology, and responses to the Covid-19 epidemic, different nations have different results when it comes to research of online learning. The Netherlands was comparatively well-prepared for remote learning compared to other nations, with high availability of the essential technology infrastructure for digital education. In emerging and recently industrialized nations, technological barriers to digital resource accessibility have been far more troublesome (ibid.).

Maican and Cocoradă (2021) had the aim to analyse university students' behaviours, emotions and perceptions associated to online foreign language learning during the pandemic and their correlation. Their research has revealed that “coping behaviours and positive and negative emotions, although different, are related and coexist in the

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieval practice is a well-established and effective study method in which learners are prompted to actively recall the learning material (Rowland, 2014)

online learning of foreign languages during the pandemic as far as undergraduates are concerned.” (ibid). They concluded that teachers should help the students reflect on their online learning process, stimulate positive activating emotions and help them be more resilient in distressing situations. Low-achieving students should get extra attention from their teachers and high-achieving students should be challenged more to ensure their progress. Some activities that have been found to engage students while reducing anxiety and increasing knowledge are online lectures, discussion questions, email communication (ibid).

Klimova (2021) also researched which language skills and features students consider the best and worst to practice online (Figure 3). According to the data, students want to improve their listening comprehension and speaking skills first, then their pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Reading and writing, which are not substantially different from face-to-face lessons, are the least valued abilities (ibid.).

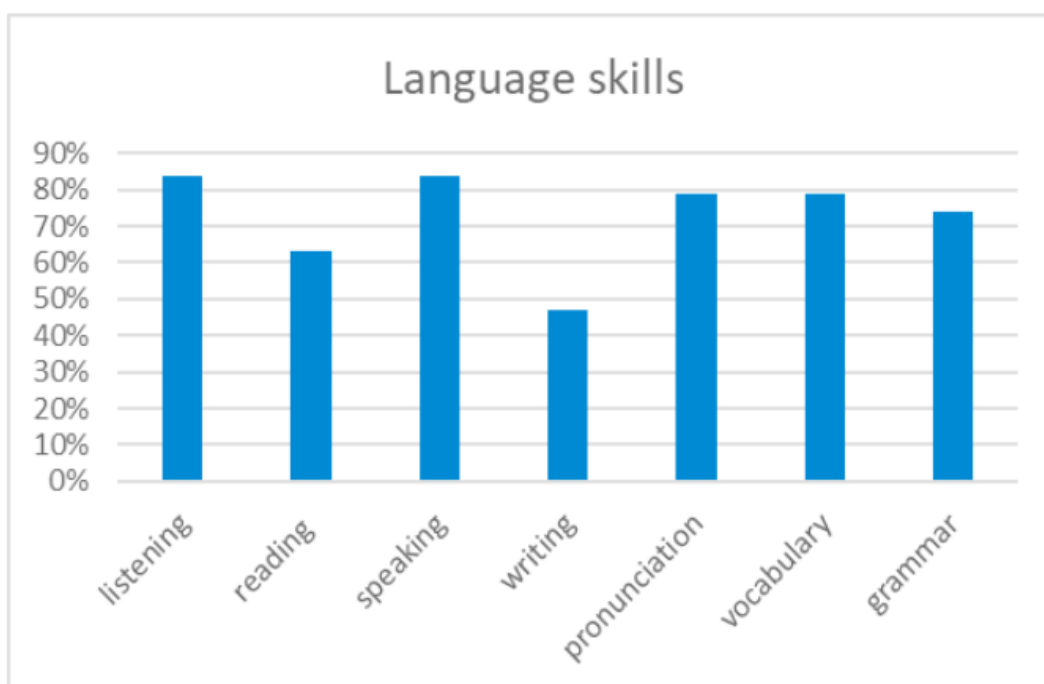


Figure 3 – Language skill/s and feature/s which are thought to be good to practise online (Klimova, 2021)

Cergol (2020) conducted research on emotions in higher education, and participants were students from the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb. Main points of research were: 1) emotions should be observed separately from academic success, 2) students bring their emotions with them to class, 3) students who study education

should be reminded to work on their own socio-emotional competences and their competences to work with children. Results of this research did not show a connection between the student's emotions towards a specific subject and their academic success in this subject. Three years later, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the same group of students were asked how they were coping with everyday stress, what were the biggest stressors for them, how they were handling class requirements during Covid-19, whether online learning was more stressful than in person learning and which type of learning they preferred. Students named both positive and negative sides of online learning. Positive: more time, no traveling, no long breaks, more time to sleep, they feel more relaxed at home, it is better when professor give lessons through online platforms. Negative: less contact with professor, a lot of assignments, anger towards colleagues who turn their cameras off and do other things instead of listening to lectures, less contact with colleagues and friends, it is difficult to keep track of all the messages and notifications, last minute schedule changes, longer lessons (ibid.).

## **5.1 SITUATION IN CROATIA**

Croatian Ministry of Science and Education (2020 a, b) reacted quickly to this situation and released two key documents: *Smjernice osnovnim i srednjim školama vezano uz organizaciju nastave na daljinu uz pomoć informacijsko – komunikacijske tehnologije* (engl. “Guidelines for primary and secondary schools regarding the organization of distance learning with the help of information and communication technology”), and *Uputa svim osnovnim i srednjim školama vezano uz organizaciju nastave na daljinu* (engl. “Instructions to all primary and secondary schools regarding the organization of distance learning”) which gave some directions to teachers and principals on how to continue with their work.

In Croatia, online learning for primary schools, high schools, and higher education started on March 16, 2020. There has been a curricular reform going on in Croatia since 2016, and as a part of it, a pilot program of digital transformation started in 2017. It includes improving the digital skills of students, teachers, professors, professional associates and principals as well as getting the right equipment for schools (Runtić and Kavelj, 2020). This means that the schools that had been a part of the pilot program had better technical equipment when Covid-19 spread.

For lower primary school pupils (1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade) classes were filmed and broadcasted on Croatian National Television (CNT) – School on CNT, channel 3. These classes were taught by primary school teachers. Also, every teacher sent additional work for students to their parents. A lot of teachers used video lectures and interactive multimedia (Ministry of Science and Education, 2020c).

For upper primary (5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade) and high schools, video lectures were filmed and sent to students. These lectures lasted about 15 minutes per subject. There were virtual classrooms on many different platforms (Edmodo, Loomen, Microsoft Teams, Yammer and others) where teachers interacted with their students. (Ministry of Science and Education, 2020c)

## **6 AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The aim of this study was to investigate primary school pupils' emotions and attitudes on remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. To achieve this aim, five research questions were formed:

RQ1: Where do the participants live and how did they follow online classes?

(Chapter 8.1)

RQ2: What feelings did the participants experience in the course of online learning?

What were the greatest difficulties they encountered? (Chapter 8.2)

RQ3: What were the positive aspects of online learning? (Chapter 8.3)

RQ4: How did the participants continue to socially engage with their peers? Did they help each other during these challenging times? (Chapter 8.4)

RQ5: What differences did they notice in learning English online versus learning it in person? Did it bother them that the teacher had to wear a mask in class when they came back to school? (Chapter 8.5)

## **7 METHODOLOGY**

### **7.1 PARTICIPANTS**

The research focused on one class of fourth graders. Parents of twenty pupils signed a consent (Appendix 3) for their children to participate, and nineteen of them participated – seven boys and twelve girls. The school principal also gave her consent for the research to be conducted in her school. Fourth graders were chosen because

they were old enough to have had experienced a lot of in-person learning prior to going online, more than younger pupils – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders and could compare online and in-person learning.

## **7.2 INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURE**

A semi-structured focus group interview was designed and conducted for the purposes of this study inquiring about the pupils' differences in emotions in attending school in person and online. The questions focused on four aspects of their learning and social experience during the pandemic: online learning, in person learning, English language learning, social interactions between pupils during the pandemic. The questions designed for this interview are in the Appendix 1.

The study was conducted in one primary school in Velika Gorica. There were three groups of five pupils, and one group of four pupils. Each focus group interview lasted between ten to twenty minutes. There were about nineteen questions prepared for the interview, but not all of them had to be answered in every group. For example, the question: "Was there a time everyone in class had to wear masks?" was answered by the first group so there was no need to repeat it since all the pupils were in the same class. Together, all four interviews lasted for about 50 minutes.

At the beginning of the interviews the pupils were told there were no right or wrong answers, nobody would know their answers except for the researcher and that they could be completely honest. They were also told that the interview would be recorded, but no one would have access to the recording except for the researcher.

The pupils were happy to participate and were eager to share. We had an agreement that I would ask a question and they would answer it one by one going in circles. This did not always work because some of them were too excited to share so they could not wait for their turn. They did not interrupt each other too much and their stories kept complementing each other. They shared more than I asked which I hoped would happen. I took this as a sign they were being honest and were feeling relaxed.

## **8 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As a part of this research, the pupils were asked to recall the time they spent in online learning due to the national lockdown in which all schools in Croatia closed. They answered a number of questions talking about whether they liked online learning, what were the greatest difficulties for them, and how they overcame these difficulties.

Provided in the following text are their common responses and a selection of quotes in order to portray their emotions regarding online and in person learning. Pupils participated in the interview in four groups. In the following text, the participants will be referred to as P1, P2...P20 (pupil 1, pupil 2...pupil 20).

## **8.1 ONLINE LEARNING**

In the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked if they all lived in Velika Gorica, where their school is located, because regular commuting to school could have had an effect on whether they felt comfortable with online learning (O'Kane, 2020). The answer was yes, all pupils lived in Velika Gorica at the time of the lockdown. When asked how long they had been taking part in remote learning, they could not remember exactly because it was on and off, and not the same for all grade levels. When the pandemic started, schools closed and for the rest of the school year all primary schools in Croatia remained that way. When the new school year began (2020/2021) schools reopened, but all pupils from one class had to isolate if anyone from the class tested positive for Covid-19 (Ministry of Science and Education, 2020c).

Some pupils used their phones to keep track of online learning (P11, P12, P13, P14). The pupils said they mostly participated in online learning via e-mail: "Well the teacher sent us an e-mail every time at 8am, our mom would open it, we would do our homework, she sent us some videos from channel 3, and we watched that." (P6). This pupil is talking about School on CNT, channel 3, a programme that was specially designed for remote learning at the time of the pandemic (Ministry of Science and Education, 2020d). Reactions to the mention of School on CNT were not very positive. Pupils complained about how what was shown on TV was not the same as what they were doing in school at the time (P1, P2). Some of their responses were: "I have no idea why we are supposed to watch that." (P3); "We had to (watch it) at first, but later we didn't because we had already learned everything they did there, so our teacher e-mailed (materials) to our parents." (P12). P2 pointed out that her brother, who was in high school, had video call lessons and everyone in the house had to be quiet so she could not watch television when she was supposed to. In a research done on high school students, it was found that "13% of participants has severe equipment difficulties, and a little over ¼ of participants has to share a device with other members of the household." (Runtić, Kavelj, 2020). It would be easy to say that Croatia was not technologically prepared for this form of learning, but Sense et al. (2021) report that



even in the Netherlands access to the appropriate digital educational materials and online learning tools was not universal, but was found to vary depending on socio-economic factors, teachers' familiarity and experience with these resources. This is interesting because compared to other countries, the Netherlands was relatively well-prepared for distance learning with good availability of the necessary technological infrastructure for digital education (Engzell, Frey, Verhagen, 2020).

## **8.2 FEELINGS AND GREATEST DIFFICULTIES**

We were two minutes into the semi-structured interview with the first group and the pupils eagerly wanted to share how much homework they have been getting even though that question had not yet been asked: "We had to watch two videos for English that lasted two hours" (P2), and then we got an honest confession: "I would just skip that which was not important" (P1). Many participants started complaining about homework before they were asked about the difficulties. On the other hand, Runtić and Kavelj (2020) found that almost 1/3 of participants in their research studied one to three hours a day which is less than was recommended by the Ministry in time of remote learning (2020e). It is even less than the recommended time for lower primary school pupils, which is 5 hours (Ministry of Science and Education, 2020e). Since their research was carried out with high school students, the results cannot be compared, but it is interesting to see what students think about learning. They say they have too many tasks, but do not actually spend that much time doing them. Our participants were not asked how much time they spent doing school assignments and studying, but it would be interesting to see if their feelings of doing too much are in touch with reality, or does it just seem too much for them because it is different to what they are used to. When it comes to tools used for online learning, Maican and Cocoradă (2021) found that students value PowerPoint presentations higher, which might be explained in part by the students' experience with such tools during in person learning. On the other hand, this might be related to students' desire for instructional materials that are available for a long time on the e-learning platform. The individualized feedback received from the teacher is their participants' least favorite resource on the e-learning platform. Authors assume this is likely due to the online environment's generally slower response time compared to face-to-face education.

When asked about the greatest difficulties they shared again that they did not have enough time for all the homework and had almost no time to go out and play. "My

head hurt from writing all the time” (P4); “I’ve had enough of online school already” (P8); “It was harder in the third grade than in the fourth grade (...) the beginning was horrible” (P16). P7 and P8 shared it was hard for them to understand Mathematics at this time. P18 recognized she was not as responsible the first week as she was later: “I spent almost all week playing and forgot what needs to be done (...) (thinking) I’ll do it at night... and then you forget.” Jokić and Ristić Dedić (2021) found that the pandemic had a negative or severely negative effect on 50.3% of eight graders in “doing extracurricular activities and hobbies” and the same goes for 43.9% of eight graders in “doing physical activities and sports.”

Many of them (P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P16, P17, P18, P19) shared that their parents, especially mothers, were very helpful at this time. Most of them mentioned English and Mathematics as problematic subjects because they had a lot of homework, but did not understand what they had to do, or how to do it. P1 said that his mother was working so no one could help him when he encountered difficulties. P2 shared they only had one laptop at home, and she would always give in homework too late because her mother and brother also needed to use the laptop. P18 said that she had to do everything over her phone because they did not have a computer or a laptop so everything she did was “messed up”. According to UNICEF (2020), at least 31% of students all over the world are unable to benefit from remote learning programs, due to insufficient family assets or guidelines suited toward their needs.

Interestingly, P19 pointed out that it is a lot different to learn in your room because it is quiet, and there is always some noise in the classroom. She did not classify this as being good or bad, but the rest of the group (P16, P17, P18) said it is much more fun to be in the classroom precisely because of this “even though boys are always doing something.” Scarpellini, Segre, Cartabia, Zanetti, Campi, Clavenna Bonati, (2021) found that “the lack of structured, daily school life and the absence of interactions with peers, together with an instable quarantine routine, had an impact on the emotional and behavioural conditions of children.” They also found that these behavioural and emotional problems were more severe in (lower) primary school pupils than in middle school (upper primary school) students, owing to insecure and poorly structured distance learning for the younger pupils, which resulted in increased restlessness and aggression, lack of commitment during lessons, and limited autonomy. P9 expressed

his frustration like this: “There are three worst things in the world, first is online learning, second are earthquakes and the third is the corona virus.”<sup>2</sup>

P1 and some others said that their parents let them do the homework by themselves and would then correct the errors before sending it to the teacher. Some pupils would wait for their parents to come home from work and then they would help them with whatever they did not know: “There was a lot of things we did not know. I would leave at least two pages (unsolved).” (P1). P11 and P15 mentioned getting help from siblings: “I have an older brother, so he also helped me sometimes.” (P15). Pupils often thought they had forgotten to complete a task, because there was so much to do, and would repeatedly check their e-mails. P14 shared this: “I would grit my teeth, start solving (the homework), and when I didn’t know, I would try to remember whether we had done it at school, look it up, and if I still didn’t know it myself, I would use a calculator.”

Children missed regular school attendance a lot: “I missed everything, it (online school) was much harder.” (P16). P1 even said he missed exams because there were no exams for lower primary school pupils at the time of the lockdown. P9 expressed he would rather that school was never online because they had a lot of tests when they got back and had to study more than before. They also missed their teacher because “she explains everything much better in school.” (P11). Pupils mentioned having quizzes instead of tests, but these were not graded: “The best thing was that we could look something up if we didn’t know it.” (P15).

When pupils were asked about the role their teacher had had, and how she had helped, they reported that she had sent them homework and corrected the assignments they had handed in. They would have to take a picture of it and send it back to her to check (P15). From their immediate answers, it looked like the teacher did not do a lot to help,

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to point out the earthquakes that hit Croatia at this time. The epicentre of the first one was in Zagreb, and it happened on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 (Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb, 2020a). The second strong one happened near Petrinja on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020 (Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb, 2020a). Velika Gorica is in the middle of Zagreb and Petrinja, so the participants of the interview experienced both earthquakes strongly. This was not a part of the interview, but in a conversation I had with their teacher about the class, she said that some pupils are still afraid of earthquakes and that one student is experiencing severe anxiety because of them. Even though this was not a part of the research, it played an important role in the lives of these students, the memories of the earthquakes were still fresh, and it cannot be looked over.

but this was not so. On the other hand, many of them mentioned that their parents would call the teacher if they had any questions, and she would answer. P12 and P13 agreed that there was no problem when it came to calling the teacher for help. When asked what they missed most about school, the second most popular answer (after friends) was “the teacher!”. P16 said she “felt silly” asking the teacher for help because her mother could help her, so she never tried that. P13 concluded that even though her parents were helping her a lot, they were not a good substitute for the teacher.

Once the pupils got back to school, they still had some difficulties, but had ideas how to help themselves. They would ask their teacher, parents or friends for help: “I asked the teacher if I could stay in the remedial classes and she helped me there” (P2), “my friend wasn’t in school when we learned quotation marks so I came to her house and helped her” (P2), “we had to learn something in pairs, and I learned it through a video call with my friend” (P4), “I most often ask my mom and dad.” (P3). Participants say they are mostly happy to be back in school because “there’s less homework.” (P9). They believe that their teacher is aware of the fact that pupils cannot know how to solve everything. According to P14 and P15, if they do not know how to solve something, and if their parents cannot help them, they just leave it blank to be explained in school the next day.

One of the conclusions to which Jokić and Dedić (2020) came in the preliminary results of their research is that “(s)tudents of all generations estimate classroom learning to be of better quality than remote learning. This is especially relevant for key learning elements like intelligibility, clarity and curiosity.” Even though our research was conducted in one grade level, it is in line with what Jokić and Dedić found researching opinions of students and teachers from 161 primary and secondary schools all over Croatia. In their research, 37% of sixth graders answered that the Covid-19 pandemic affected their lives negatively or extremely negatively and 8% said it affected their lives positively or extremely positively.

This topic was also explored in Italy (Scarpellini et al., 2021) where parents were the ones answering the questions. Their study indicated that online learning was not highly appreciated by parents due to a lack of organization and scheduled routine, as well as the absence of assessment of the children's work and the difficulties in reaching the teachers.

### 8.3 POSITIVE ASPECTS

The pupils were also asked about the positive aspects of online learning. They did not have as much to say about positive aspects as they did about the negative ones, but there were some things they shared. The advantages that were pointed out by the participants were: more time to sleep, spending more time at home, and creative work for subjects like P.E, art and music. Not writing tests was mentioned both as an advantage and as a disadvantage, but there were more pupils who classified it as an advantage (P13, P14, P15) than as a disadvantage (P9). More time to sleep and spending more time at home were also mentioned as advantages of online learning by the students of the Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Zagreb (Cergol, 2021).

P4 said he liked remote learning because the pupils “did not have to spend a lot of time in school”, and P13 liked that when school was supposed to be in the morning, she could sleep in and still catch up with work later in the day. P14 and P15 agreed with this point. Many participants liked not having to spend a lot of time in school, but only in the beginning of online learning. It seems they quickly got tired of being home (P4, P11, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19). Being able to sleep longer is also mentioned as an advantage to remote learning among high school students. On the other hand, they mentioned many other advantages our participants did not: interesting teaching, flexibility in organising studying, less tasks and less time spent on studying, engagement and effort of the teachers, reasonable deadlines (Runtić, Kavelj, 2020). One other positive aspect that was not mentioned by our participants is the ability to work at one’s own pace. Sense et al. (2021) found that “learning activity increased during what would normally be students’ regular school hours.” It can be argued that students are able to work better when there is no time stamp on when they need to start and finish a task.

There were a couple of subjects that the pupils pointed out as being fun during remote learning – art, music and P.E. Some pupils mentioned art class because they were given creative tasks: “We made little dice and then we made some strips out of them” (P7), “My favourite was when we made a man out of fruits and vegetables.” (P9). One student mentioned music class as being fun because they could listen to music they liked as a part of learning: “We opened a web-page, and we could listen to songs there.” (P8). A couple of them agreed that P.E. was great to do at home because it

looked different than it did at school: “We jumped around the house.” (P10). On the other hand, P17 said that P.E. was the best because she did not have to do it but could lie down at that time: “I never worked out.” Only P6 pointed out P.E. as being the hardest subject to do from home because he did not have enough space to do what was required.

#### **8.4 SOCIAL INTERACTIONS**

When asked what they missed most about school, P7, P8, P9, P10 unanimously answered “friends!”, and that answer was also provided by many other pupils (P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19). The participants said they spent time with their friends even during the complete lockdown when they were healthy. They would play or do homework together. Sometimes they went out together, usually to the park, but more often they would visit each other at home: “Sometimes I would get in touch with my friend through a regular or video call and I would help him do his homework.” (P6). They also had WhatsApp groups through which they would help each other with homework: “If I forgot what we got for homework, I could just ask in the group.” (P14). However, not all of them own a phone, so they could not be in these groups. They depended on their family for help. Even though they had WhatsApp groups and helped each other through them, not all of them were happy that they had to use these ways of communication: “If I didn’t answer for a couple of days, everyone would send me about two hundred text messages.” (P1). This same problem was reported by a group of students from the Faculty of Teacher Education in Zagreb. They felt anxious because of constant messages they got related to online learning: “The worst thing was that I wanted to throw my phone out the window because the messages just kept coming, but at the same time, I couldn’t afford not using it so as not to accidentally miss a notification or homework.” (Cergol, 2021). A minority of participants stated that they did not spend time with friends at the time of the lockdown (P9, P10, P17, P18).

At the time of the interview, in April 2021, there were still many restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so the pupils were asked if they still spent time with friends. Many of them said they spend time with friends every day: “We meet at a park and then we ride our bikes” (P6), “my friend comes over every weekend for a sleepover.” (P13).

Jokić and Dedić (2020) found that 40.9% of students formed better relations with close friends during the Covid-19 pandemic. They have not yet given a reason as to why that is, but we can see from the answers in our research that the pupils had to make their friendships more intentional if they wanted to spend time with each other. Since there was no school, they had to make an effort in order to keep the friendships alive.

Foulkes and Blakemore (2021) examined the quality of an adolescent's existing peer relationships and pointed out that school closures can have a positive, negative, or negligible impact on an adolescents' mental health, depending on the individual. They concluded that there are many factors that could contribute to these differing effects, including family relationships, socio-economic status, personality traits, and existing mental health problems. Foulkes and Blakemore (2021) highlighted that for some young people with high-quality peer relationships, lockdown and restrictions might be a manageable disruption involving a temporary switch to online socializing, or alternatively a lonely and deeply frustrating end to rewarding in-person socializing. For those with poor-quality peer relationships, particularly those being bullied, lockdown might be a welcome relief, although possibly not for those who are still bullied online or by siblings (Foulkes and Blakemore, 2021). There was no mention of bullying among our participants, and none of the participants stated they liked not seeing their friends.

## **8.5 LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

When asked if they had problems with learning English remotely, opinions were divided. For some participants it was easy, and others pointed out there was a lot of homework and that bothered them. No one said that the tasks were difficult, but that there were too many of them. In the study conducted by Maican and Cocoradă (2021) students reported “negative emotions generated by the lack of interaction with peers and the teacher, as well as the feeling that the development of their language skills and knowledge could be endangered.” Since this research was conducted with higher education students, it is interesting to compare and see how none of our lower primary school participants were worried about the potential lack of development in their language skills. Maybe younger pupils are not aware of how much learning they do because their English lessons are often fun and full of different activities and games. Older students know that they are learning a lot of new material with every lesson, and

it might bother them to know that they are missing out on something or not getting enough explanation on a particular topic.

Our participants' main problem with online learning and English online learning in particular is the amount of homework and assignments they have to do. P1 shared this as her way of coping with homework: "I would only listen, and then, when she (the English teacher) gave homework, I would stop the video and do it right away." P5 complained about the tasks being "tiring" because it took a long time to solve them, and there were also some assignments from YouTube that she saw no point in. They did say that the lectures were always linked to something they did from the workbook. More pupils had similar answers: "It was hard for me because there were two videos that lasted 40 minutes." (P7); "Videos lasted a long time, and we had to write a lot." (P13). P1 pointed out that the teacher always says everything in Croatian and in English. Even though this pupil sees this as a downside, it is common practice among lower primary English teachers to make sure the pupils understand the task: "She always says everything double, in Croatian and in English, and we have to listen twice as long." P3 was upset about too much writing they had to do for each class: "two pages every time."

Maican and Cocoradă (2021) found that "high-achieving students report a higher level of FL anxiety compared to medium- and low-achieving students." In our research, there were pupils who pointed out that they know English very well, but still thought there were too many tasks: "It wasn't hard for me because I (also) know a lot of English, but it was a problem for me because I had to write a lot into my notebook, and stop the videos so time went by quickly." (P12). P9 also mentioned it was "tiring" having to stop the video lesson often to write things down or solve a task. P16, P17, P18 and P19 agreed that English was "pretty easy" during online learning. They also mentioned that the teacher would give them the answers, so the pupils who did not know how to solve something would copy it (P16, P17). We can see that their main issue with learning English online was not with achieving a certain grade or level, but sitting down and doing everything they were required to do. They were satisfied with doing the bare minimum. We cannot say exactly why that is, but it could be because there were no grades at this time, and the pupils did not have to worry about them. The results might have been different if the assignments had been graded or if there had been tests during online learning at the time of the pandemic.



Once the pupils returned to school, teachers still had to wear masks because they went from one classroom to another multiple times a day. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10 and some others said they could understand their English teacher well even when she was wearing a mask: “She usually takes it off when she isn’t close to us” (P2), “She is loud.” (P4). On the other hand, P11, P12, and P13 said they could not understand their English teacher well, but that she talked louder when it was necessary.

## **9 CONCLUSION**

Overall, it may be concluded that lower primary school pupils did not have a pleasant experience when it came to online learning. At first, they liked not having to spend a lot of time in school, but they stopped thinking about this advantage as soon as homework started piling up. The biggest difficulties our participants mentioned were the lack of explanation by the teacher and excessive amounts of writing they had to do. They also missed sharing school experiences with their friends even though they did play and spend time together in the time of the lockdown. Pupils helped each other with homework using video calls and WhatsApp groups. The greatest help they mentioned were their parents, who played a considerable role in their children's education once the pandemic hit. Even the pupils who would call their teacher for help with something would only do it if their parents did not know the answer. School on CNT was of no help for this group of four graders because what was done in those TV classes did not align with what they were supposed to study.

It must be noted that after the pandemic had started, two big earthquakes hit areas close to where our participants live, so it is no wonder there was lack of motivation for learning, and as it has previously been stated, motivation is crucial for successful learning. Even though they were not asked about how they felt about the earthquakes, some of them mentioned them on their own as something that was bothering them at this time.

When it comes to learning English, all the participants said they liked it a lot more when it was done in the classroom. When they were learning remotely, they often found it rather tiring because of all the videos they had to watch. The participants did not mention the quality of the videos, but it was tiring for them because they would have to stop them to write something down, and that would take up a lot of time.

As they stated, when the lockdown occurred, many children saw it as an opportunity to relax and play. Even though play is one of the most important things in the lives of young pupils, as it should be, there are some tasks they have to do in order to learn and revise what was done in school. To allow children enough time to play, relax and learn, all lower primary school teachers could give their pupils an "at home schedule". Since children are not used to organizing their own time, it would be beneficial to them if the teacher would try to give them an example of what a productive and fun day could

look like when they are learning online. For example: 1. waking up at 8:30 am; 2. having a good, nutritious breakfast; 3. doing schoolwork from 9:30 to 11:00; 4. stretching and playing for half an hour; 5. studying until 1pm; 6. lunch break and resting; 7. going outside and playing until 6pm; 8. having dinner and helping out with the dishes; 9. finishing up any studying or homework if there is anything left; 10. winding down with a book or a movie; 11. going to bed at 9:30pm. This is just a suggestion. Even though the Ministry of Science and Education (2020e) gave a proposal on what a study day should look like, a class teacher knows their pupils and the amount of homework best, so they would be better to advise them on time management.

The findings of this case study cannot be generalised, of course, but are a good pointer at what bothers children the most about remote learning. The results of this research could be used in the future for adapting to the needs of pupils if it ever again becomes necessary to use remote learning in this pandemic or for any other reason.

## **10 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Even though our participants were not asked how much time they spent doing school assignments and studying, many of them mentioned this when asked about the greatest difficulties. They reported spending more time doing school work at the time of online learning than when they do regular in person learning. It would be interesting to see if their feelings of doing too much are in touch with reality, or does it just seem too much for them because it is different to what they are used to.

Furthermore, this study was conducted in one fourth grade, and online learning was at its peak while they were in the third grade. It would be interesting to see if there are any differences in emotions towards online learning between different primary school levels.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **QUESTIONS FOR THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

1. Do you live in Velika Gorica or somewhere nearby?
2. How did you follow online classes?
3. What did you like in online classes?
4. What was the biggest issue you had?
5. How did you solve that issue?
6. In what way did you handle examinations, and how did you deal with them?
7. Did you still associate with friends at the time of the lockdown?
8. If yes, in which ways?
9. Do you associate with friends now when the lockdown has stopped, but not completely?
10. What did you miss at the time of online classes?
11. Did you find it difficult to manage life in the new situation?
12. Did you all help each other?
13. If yes, in which ways?
14. How did your teacher help you at that time?
15. Did you find English classes harder to understand?
16. Is it a problem for you that the English teacher has to wear a mask? Do you understand her as well as you understood her when she was not wearing the mask?
17. If it is harder for you to follow the lectures now, how do you help yourself?
18. Was there a time everyone in the class had to wear a mask?
19. If yes, how did you like that?

## APPENDIX 2

Poštovana ravnateljice *Prezime*,

moje ime je Marija Magdalena Sever i studentica sam na Učiteljskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. Provodim istraživanje na temu „Emocije u nastavi – usporedba online i učionične nastave“. Cilj je istražiti promjene u emocijama učenika za vrijeme online nastave i nastave koja se odvija u učionici. Za potrebe istraživanja za diplomski rad bih provela intervju sa učenicima, a oni bi za intervju bili podijeljeni u grupe (pet učenika u svakoj grupi). Za svaku grupu bilo bi potrebno 20 minuta. Pri obradi rezultata podatci bi bili anonimizirani. Vjerujem da učenicima neće biti problem podijeliti svoja razmišljanja sa mnom, a ako bi neko dijete pokazalo eventualnu neugodu tijekom provođenja testiranja, ono će se odmah prekinuti. Molila bih Vas da mi dopustite provesti navedeno istraživanje s učenicima Vaše škole. Za potrebe istraživanja pripremila bih dokument pisanoga pristanka namijenjen roditeljima te bi se zatražio i usmeni pristanak učenika. Vaše eventualno odobrenje i pristanak roditelja moguće je u svakom trenutku povući.

Unaprijed zahvaljujem na Vašem vremenu.

S poštovanjem,

Marija Magdalena Sever

### APPENDIX 3

Poštovani roditelji,

moje ime je Marija Magdalena Sever i studentica sam na Učiteljskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu. Provodim istraživanje na temu „Emocije u nastavi – usporedba online i učionične nastave“. Cilj je istražiti promjene u emocijama učenika za vrijeme online nastave i nastave koja se odvija u učionici. Za potrebe istraživanja za diplomski rad bih u ožujku ove godine provela intervjue sa učenicima, a oni bi za intervjue bili podijeljeni u grupe (šest učenika u svakoj grupi). Za svaku grupu bilo bi potrebno 20 minuta. Pri obradi rezultata podatci bi bili anonimizirani te se ime Vašeg djeteta nigdje ne bi spominjalo. Vjerujem da učenicima neće biti problem podijeliti svoja razmišljanja sa mnom, a ako bi neko dijete pokazalo eventualnu neugodu tijekom provođenja testiranja, ono će se odmah prekinuti. Vaš eventualni pristanak moguće je u svakom trenutku povući. Također, Vaše dijete može u svakom trenutku odustati bez ikakvog objašnjenja ili posljedica.

Ako imate kakvih pitanja, molim Vas da me budete slobodni kontaktirati.

Unaprijed zahvaljujem na Vašem vremenu.

S poštovanjem,

Marija Magdalena Sever

#### SUGLASNOST

Suglasan sam da moje dijete

---

(prezime i ime, razred)

sudjeluje u istraživanju

(molim, zaokružite DA ukoliko ste suglasni da dijete sudjeluje u istraživanju, a NE ukoliko to ne želite).

DA

NE

Potpis roditelja

Datum

## **IZJAVA O SAMOSTALNOJ IZRADI RADA**

Izjavljujem da sam ja, Marija Magdalena Sever, studentica integriranoga preddiplomskoga i diplomskoga sveučilišnoga studija primarnog obrazovanja s engleskim jezikom na Učiteljskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu (u Zagrebu), samostalno provela aktivnosti istraživanja, te istraživanje literature i samostalno napisala diplomski rad na temu: EMOTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM – COMPARISON BETWEEN ONLINE AND IN PERSON LEARNING.

Zagreb, lipanj 2022.

Marija Magdalena Sever

Potpis: \_\_\_\_\_

Učiteljski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagreb