

Sveučilište u Zagrebu  
Filozofski fakultet  
Odsjek za anglistku  
Katedra za metodiku

PERCEPTION OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN CROATIAN PRIMARY  
SCHOOL LEARNERS OF ENGLISH  
[PERCEPCIJA INTERKULTURALNE KOMPETENCIJE KOD UČENIKA ENGLESKOG  
JEZIKA U OSNOVNOJ ŠKOLI]  
Diplomski rad

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Zagreb, travanj 2016.

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Graduation Thesis

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Zagreb, April 2016

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## Abstract

There has not been much research on intercultural competence in children, neither in Croatia nor in the world. The goal of the study was to examine the perception of intercultural competence in Croatian primary school learners of English – to see what it meant to them, whether they were aware of it and whether they thought it was important. The study was conducted on 37 fourth grade learners who had been learning English since the first grade. The results have shown that children possess intercultural awareness and have the potential for developing intercultural competence, as well as that they perceive the importance of some aspects of it.

Key words: intercultural competence, children, perception, English, primary school

# 1 Introduction

Because of globalisation and a fast development of technology, people from different cultures all over the world establish communication and have the need to interact successfully. English is often the language they use for communication. It has become *lingua franca*, a global language used in business, science, education and international communication of any kind. Although a certain level of proficiency is required, knowledge of the language is often not enough for successful communication, especially when interlocutors come from different cultures, bringing with them their own meanings and worldviews. Before they encounter someone from a different culture, people may not be aware that their way of thinking is influenced by their own culture or that there are conventions and beliefs different from theirs. That can lead to various misinterpretation and misunderstandings, making the communication difficult. To communicate successfully, both interlocutors need to be aware of their own position as well as of the position of the other. The first step towards successful communication is “recognizing differences and variations within one’s own culture and within other cultures [and] abandoning the idea that everybody sees the world in pretty much the same way” (Clanfield, 2008, p.6), as the recognition or awareness of otherness lays foundation for intercultural communication. According to Byram, “awareness that one is a product of one’s own socialization” and awareness of the fact that “parallel yet different modes of interaction can be expected in other cultures” is a precondition for understanding one’s reactions to otherness (1997, p. 52). The experience of the other may lead to questioning one’s own conventions, beliefs and values, which before seemed natural and were taken for granted. However, awareness of otherness alone is not enough. It may be a good starting point for developing intercultural competence, but intercultural competence itself is a more complex skill. According to Alred, Byram & Fleming intercultural competence “is both the awareness of experiencing otherness and the ability to analyse the experience and act upon the insights into self and other which the analysis brings” (2003, p. 4). It implies a set of different skills, attitudes and knowledge.

There has been much research dealing with individual components of intercultural competence and various aspects of it, such as teaching, measuring and assessment. However, research on intercultural competence in children has been scarce. One of the reasons is the belief that children are not enough cognitively and emotionally mature to master intercultural competence. There are still no developmental models of intercultural competence for children

and adolescents, and those designed for adults cannot be applied because of the specificity of cognitive and affective development at school age and because of the characteristics of school environment (Šenjug Golub, 2013). However, in a world of increasing mobility children also find themselves in touch with people from different cultures and the topic of intercultural competence concerns them as well. The aim of this research study was to examine children's perceptions of intercultural competence to find out whether they are aware of it, what it means for them and why they think it is important. The first part of the paper outlines definitions of and findings about intercultural competence, as well as characteristics of children's development, while the second part of the paper presents the study conducted on the perception of intercultural competence in a primary school in Croatia.

## 2 Culture and Language

There is no universal definition of culture. According to Kramersch, culture stands for “...membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings” (1998, p. 10). It can also be defined as a set of conventions, beliefs and attitudes accepted by members of a community, and it can be looked at from different perspectives. If we take, for example, a humanistic point of view, culture includes art, social institutions and other society products (cf. Kramersch, 1995). We can also talk about culture in terms of culture with little and culture with big C, where culture with big C represents the so-called “high” culture which includes music, arts, literature – elements of culture usually found in textbooks and taught at school; while culture with little c includes customs, values, ways of dressing, food, the so-called “low” culture (Oswalt, 1970; Brooks, 1975, as cited in Bagić, 2014, p. 9). Although culture with little and big c both form culture as a whole, teachers are often faced with the question of which culture to teach and it can happen that they neglect the aspect of culture with little c. Kramersch (1991) states that culture in schools has been taught according to “foods, fairs, folklore and statistics” principle. That kind of approach to teaching culture cannot give students a complete insight into the target culture and it can lead to creating stereotypes, instead of giving them an opportunity to see the bigger picture and to develop cultural awareness. For developing cultural awareness, as one of the preconditions for developing intercultural competence, many researchers agree it is necessary to have knowledge of both low and high culture, big C and little c culture. Also, what is clear is that language cannot be taught without culture. Language and culture are intertwined. Culture is expressed through language, and at the same time language, its rules and interpretation are part of culture. Language and culture are therefore always in interaction and one without the other is incomplete, as Samovar et al. point out:

In order to have a culture, language is needed so group members can share knowledge of beliefs, values, and behaviors and engage in communal endeavors. In turn, culture is needed to organize disparate individuals into a cohesive group so those beliefs, values, behaviors, and communal activities can develop. Thus, it is readily apparent that language and culture are inseparable.”

(Samovar et al. 2009, p. 228, as cited in Bagić, 2014, p.12).



In order to be interculturally competent, students need the knowledge of culture. Byram, in terms of the development of intercultural competence, believes that individuals learning the language also learn about culture and its values and knowledge:

Language is not simply a reflector of an objective cultural reality. It is an integral part of that reality through which other parts are shaped and interpreted. It is both a symbol of the whole and a part of the whole which shapes and is in turn shaped by sociocultural actions, beliefs and values. In engaging in language, speakers are enacting sociocultural phenomena; in acquiring language, children acquire culture.

(Byram, 1991, p. 18).

According to Byram, language and culture are inseparable not only because language reflects culture, but because of its dual and reciprocal role in culture – it influences culture and it is at the same time influenced by cultural actions, beliefs and values. Children learning the language thus at the same time accept its underlying beliefs and values, and by learning the language they learn about the culture. There is no language free of cultural influence.

### **3 Intercultural Competence**

Intercultural competence as a term started being more seriously dealt with in the 1970s. In the next two decades there were many attempts to define it and as a result of research the first more elaborate model was designed in the 1990s (Šenjug Golub, 2013). The phrase *intercultural speaker* was first used in the mid-1990s in a paper whose purpose was to suggest how levels of socio-cultural competence might be defined and assessed in a way similar to the levels of linguistic competence, that were later published in the Common European Framework of Reference. One of the biggest problems encountered in this research was the concept of the native speaker, which needed to be reassessed and replaced with a new concept, the one of the intercultural speaker (Byram, 2008), whose competencies may go beyond those of a native speaker. The intercultural speaker has to be the mediator between his own and foreign culture and tend to resolve all the possible conflicts. By doing so he also gains a redefined understanding of his own culture (Corbett, 2003), which is one of the main goals of intercultural competence.

Intercultural competence, as mentioned before, implies a whole set of skills, attitudes and knowledge. However, for Clanfield (2008), intercultural competence is not so much about knowledge as it is about skills. Since it is primarily a skill, for him intercultural competence can be enhanced by asking questions, listening and seeking clarification, negotiating, identifying common ground and avoiding prejudging or stereotyping. These skills for developing intercultural competence can be useful in teaching foreign language and they can be adapted for different classroom activities.

For Fantini (2006), the emphasis in intercultural competence is on abilities. In his article, he defined intercultural competence as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Fantini, 2006, p. 12).

As a skill or an ability, intercultural competence can be learned and enhanced, which means nobody becomes interculturally competent overnight. It is a process, possibly a never-ending one. In the process there are various stages learners go through. Bennet (2004) developed a model according to which learners developing intercultural sensitivity move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. According to Bennet, greater intercultural sensitivity leads to the potential for more intercultural competence (Bennet, 2004). Thus, intercultural sensitivity is an important precondition for intercultural competence. In the model, ethnocentrism describes a state where “beliefs and behaviours that people receive in their primary socialisation are unquestioned; they are experienced as ‘just the way things are’. On the other hand, ethnorelativism stands for “the experience of one’s own beliefs and behaviours as just one organisation of reality among many viable possibilities” (Bennet, 2004, p. 62). On the continuum between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism there are six stages: Denial of cultural difference, Defense against cultural difference, Minimization of cultural difference, Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration of cultural difference. However, this does not mean that all people go through all the stages; the assumption is that people can be more or less sensitive to cultural difference, depending on cognitive complexity of individuals (Bennet, 2004). The model for learners used here is also not a native, but an intercultural speaker. This idea of intercultural speaker is also reflected in ethnorelativism – in adaptation and integration of cultural differences, as well as in better understanding of one’s own culture.

### 3.1 Models of Intercultural Competence

For Byram (1997), Intercultural Competence is along with Linguistic, Sociolinguistic and Discourse Competence, one of the components of Intercultural Communicative Competence. In his model, Intercultural Competence consists of five components or *savoirs*: knowledge (*savoir être*), skills to discover and/or interact (*savoir apprendre/faire*), skills to interpret and relate (*savoir comprendre*), attitudes (*savoir être*) and education (*savoir s'engager*). Knowledge encompasses the knowledge of self, of others and of interaction. It stands for factual knowledge, but also for culture-specific knowledge, cultural rules and views which are different from a person's own culture. Byram states that "the declarative knowledge though necessary, is not sufficient and needs to be complemented by procedural knowledge of how to act in specific circumstances" (1997, p. 36). An example of such knowledge is the concept of time and being on time in different cultures. This kind of knowledge can be based on first-hand experience or, for instance, comparisons between educational systems, social or economic conditions (Lundgren, 2009). There are two categories of skills needed for intercultural competence – skills to interpret and relate and skills to discover and interact. Students who develop these skills have the ability to decentre and take a different perspective on events through discussion and experiences. They have the tools which are necessary to be able to step out of one's own culture and to observe objectively, without using one's own subjective perspective, meanings and beliefs. This also implies having the skills and methods to evaluate the other culture and one's own reactions to it (Lundgren, 2009). Skills are also related to knowledge because students use the knowledge they have to understand certain behaviour and interpret it and relate to comparable yet different behaviours in their culture (Byram 1997). Students also need attitudes "of curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours" (Byram 1997, p. 36). This means that they need to relativise themselves and evaluate others, but when doing so, it is necessary to decentre oneself and to analyse the other from a perspective which is free from one's own meanings and beliefs, influenced by one's own culture. Attitudes of curiosity, openness and relativizing oneself make possible to understand customs and behaviours which were thought unacceptable and incomprehensible (Lundgren, 2009). The last component of Byram's model is political and critical cultural awareness education. It has been partially already included in other components as it implies the ability

of critical thinking about customs and beliefs of both one's own and foreign culture, as well as becoming aware of one's ideological perspective and changing it in order to decentre (Byram, 1997). Although it has been criticised for not explaining relationships between intercultural competence and other components of intercultural communicative competence, and for being too general, Byram's model has been the most widely recognised and the most influential model of intercultural competence so far (Bagić, 2014).

Fantini (2000) agreed with Byram on the main components of intercultural competence, but he added one more. Fantini devised a model which consisted of five dimensions – knowledge, attitude, skills, awareness and proficiency in the host tongue, and called it A+ASK model. In this model, intercultural competence is enhanced with developing proficiency, and “learning to perceive, conceptualise and express ourselves in alternative ways”; thus developing proficiency is something that is absolutely needed for intercultural competence (Fantini 2000, p. 29). According to Fantini, there are three main domains of ability of intercultural competence that emerge from the work of many researchers: 1) the ability to develop and maintain relationships, 2) the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with minimal loss or distortion, and 3) the ability to attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others (Fantini, 2000, p. 27). He pointed out that the development of intercultural competences was a lifelong process with no end, which means one can never be completely interculturally competent. Therefore he proposed four developmental levels – Educational Traveler (a participant in short term language programs), Sojourner (longer cultural immersion which lasts 4-8 months), Professional (staff who work in an intercultural or multicultural context) and Intercultural/Multicultural Specialist (individuals involved in training, educating, consulting, and advising international students, overseas directors, and cross-cultural trainers) (Fantini, 2000, p. 30).

Deardorff (2004) defined cultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p. 184). Her Pyramid and Process Models include several key elements – knowledge, skills, awareness and attitude, but also desired internal and external outcomes. One can access this model from any point, but the degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired level of underlying elements (knowledge, skills and attitudes). Internal outcomes like adaptability, flexibility in selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviours, ethnorelative view and empathy lead to external outcomes, which are behaving

and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree (Deardorff, 2009). The Pyramid Model is linear, while the Process Model emphasises movement among the components and represents continuity of the development of intercultural competence. The latter model starts with attitudes and shows an individual's movement from individual level or attitudes to interactional level or desired outcomes (Deardorff, 2009).

### ***3.2 Intercultural Competence in Croatian Schools***

Intercultural competence as one of the goals of foreign language teaching was introduced in Croatian schools in 2005 with Croatian National Educational Standard (Šenjug Golub, 2013). In 2007, Legac, Mikulan & Siročić found that there was very little cultural content such as comparing cultures, thinking about everyday aspects of a foreign culture, talking about stereotypes etc., present in foreign language teaching in Croatian schools. Bilić-Štefan (2008) researched intercultural competence in English language textbooks for primary schools. She found that in the first four grades the emphasis was on developing language awareness. Most of the cultural content referred to factual knowledge, followed by topics from everyday life, living conditions and different professions. There were some tasks which could potentially be used for developing intercultural knowledge, but it was questionable to what extent they could serve to develop skills and attitudes needed for successful intercultural communication. Bilić-Štefan pointed out that in textbooks there should be more content dealing with cultural misunderstandings, conflicts and cultural shock, so that students become aware of potential problems and learn how to resolve them. Legac, Mikulan & Siročić (2007) researched the frequency of exposure to cultural activities and cultural content in ESL classes in two primary schools in Croatia. For each activity students were asked to state the frequency of exposure on a scale from never to very often. The activities included watching DVDs, using the Internet to find out more about the foreign culture, role plays, talking about stereotypes, reading about the history of a target country, talking about differences and similarities and some other similar activities. The research showed that students were relatively rarely exposed to those activities. The most frequently used activities were talking about aspects of everyday life and talking about what students had read or heard about the target country. The least frequently used activities were using the Internet and role plays. The conclusion of this research was that the students were not exposed enough to different activities which could potentially direct

their attention towards culture and that way develop their intercultural awareness. Also, the research showed the students found some other goals of language learning more important than learning about culture and lifestyle.

An important progress was made in 2010 when the National Curriculum Framework was published. The Framework introduced intercultural activity section into which all four skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) were included. The goal of the section was to introduce students to and teach them respect towards different cultures (Šenjug Golub, 2013). At the end of the first educational cycle – the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade – students are expected to recognise different values such as friendship, altruism, cooperation and tolerance, as well as to understand the importance of respecting their own and foreign cultures. Students should also be able to demonstrate what they have learned on basic concrete examples. Also, it is expected children learn some very basic patterns of expressing polite behaviour in a foreign language. Students are also expected to gain some specific knowledge of the foreign culture (everyday life, the language), to be able to see differences between cultures illustrated by very specific and simple examples, to react positively and openly when faced with new and unfamiliar situations and to apply appropriate patterns of behaviour in familiar situations. On the affective level, students are expected to gain positive attitude towards learning about culture and to be aware of the need to be tolerant and show empathy in communication with people belonging to different cultures (Šenjug Golub, 2013). Given that there are no models of the development of intercultural competence at school age, it is very difficult for teachers to decide which aspects of intercultural competence to teach and how to teach them. Andranka & Petravić (2007) made a list of components of intercultural competence that could be developed in primary school children. The list is based on the existing knowledge on aspects of intercultural competence and the authors' own reflections on the topic. Most of the components on the list have been integrated into Croatian National Educational Standard to a certain degree. According to Andranka & Petravić, the six components of intercultural competence at school age are:

- 1) factual knowledge about a foreign country and its culture; the ability to compare cultures
- 2) awareness of limitations to our perception and its impact on the image we create of ourselves and of others, either as members of social groups or as individuals
- 3) awareness of the importance of being persistent in understanding differences; empathy and tolerance towards other individuals and communities

- 4) awareness of the existence of prejudice and mechanisms that lead to it, the ability to recognise them and to fight against them
- 5) awareness of possible misunderstandings and conflicts caused by or based on differences between cultures; knowledge of the strategies needed to resolve them
- 6) awareness of significantly different linguistic codes and culturally conditioned meanings in both verbal and nonverbal communication

Although this model covers cognitive and affective area, social relations and sociolinguistic components, Andraža & Petračić (2007) also point out that cognitive components on the list have been dominantly developed in foreign language classes for years, while other components have often been ignored. That means the idea of intercultural competence in practice rarely goes beyond gaining factual knowledge and comparing the two cultures.

There has not been much research done on intercultural competence at school age neither in Croatia nor in the world. The existing research mostly deals with individual aspects of intercultural competence. So far, all-encompassing research of intercultural competence at school age in Croatia has not been conducted (Šenjug Golub, 2013).

#### **4 Intercultural Competence and Characteristics of Children's Development**

According to a Swiss psychologist Piaget, there are four stages of cognitive development in children: the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational stage. The stages of Piaget's theory of cognitive development that are characteristic of primary school children are the concrete operational and the formal operations stage. In the period of concrete operations, children have the ability to develop logical, concrete reasoning, but their thinking is still mainly egocentric. Another important characteristic of this period is the fact that children master conservation – the ability to see that objects or quantities remain the same despite change in their physical appearance. This stage begins around the age of 7 and lasts until the age of 11. Formal operational stage begins around the age of 11 and it is the final stage. In this stage children can think about abstract and hypothetical concepts, such as the concepts of space and time. Also, they develop deductive reasoning, become less egocentric and their thought becomes more rational and systematic.

If we look at it from the perspective of the development of intercultural competence, some of the most important changes in children's development related to intercultural competence happen between ages nine and eleven. At that age children can show stereotypes and stereotypical behaviour, they become able to see themselves from the perspective of others

(stop showing egocentric behaviour), to sympathise and show empathy (Berk, 2008). Also, children start adopting the idea of homeland between the ages 7 and 8, and by the time they are 11 the idea of homeland is fully formed on cognitive level. Although to them it is an abstract notion, they understand it is something that goes beyond themselves and their immediate environment. Before the age of 11 children tend to show negative feelings towards other countries, which comes from emphasizing differences between homeland and other countries. After the age of 11, when children develop cognitively and emotionally, they are capable of understanding the concept of the other and stop expressing negative attitude towards the other so freely (Piaget and Weil, 1951). However, research has shown that there are always exceptions and this may not be true for all children as not all children go through those stages of development. There are some contrasting findings on the age when children show stereotypes and prejudice the most. Some researchers believe that once children become aware of their national identity, they tend to overemphasise and overuse it in categorisations, but with age they focus more on characteristics and less on nationality and become able to correct or elaborate on their stereotypes. Those negative feelings and attitudes towards other nationalities according to some tend to decrease or stagnate after the age of seven (Aboud, 1988, as cited in Šenjug Golub, 2013). On the other hand, research has also shown that the tendency towards stereotypes and prejudice grows until the age of 11, after which it stagnates (Šenjug Golub, 2013). However, these findings are not universal and some children may not even favour their group or show any changes in their behaviour. There are significant individual differences in cognitive and emotional development of children. In addition to that, attitudes and beliefs can be gained from many other sources other than school context. Environment also has a big influence on children's perception of the other. Children form their opinions and attitudes towards other national groups based on the image they get from TV, books, school, teachers, friends, parents, traveling and contacts with strangers (Barrett, 2007). They can unconsciously take over their parents' beliefs, as well as some of the beliefs of other people around them. Also, they are not cognitively mature enough to be conscious of the influence their culture and immediate environment have on their thinking and behaviour. However, according to Wiegand (1992), children are the most open to accepting differences among people between the age of 9 and 11, are able to understand the concept of the foreign and empathise with the position of the other. In the study by Šenjug-Golub (2013), when compared to students in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school, students in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade showed more interest and openness towards members of the target culture. It means this age might be ideal



for developing some of the aspect of intercultural competence, as children are more open and curious at that age, possibly because they still have not been under or have not taken over much of the influence of the media or their immediate environment. Since children at that age do not yet perceive “the cultural as natural”, Byram points out that the attitude of openness and curiosity may be more easily encouraged in primary school than later (2008, p. 82). However, one of the obstacles is the belief that the inclusion of intercultural competence in primary schools might go beyond the capacities of children at that age and that it may threaten their national identity. That kind of thinking is unjustified as there is no scientific evidence to support it. Barrett (2007) found that primary school children have the general capacity for learning some of the aspects of intercultural competence. They have geographical knowledge, can already form stereotypes and acknowledge membership of national groups. Although there are many other factors that can influence the development of intercultural competence in primary school, such as other people and the environment, the key is to provide learners with learner appropriate content that is in accordance with learners’ stage of development. Curtin and Pesola (1994) identified three categories of content that can be used as a starting point for intercultural information and experience. They included cultural symbols – such as flags; cultural products – stories, songs etc.; and cultural practice – greetings, gestures, eating habits...(as cited in Byram, 2008, p. 81). Another approach, which has also been included in Croatian National Curriculum and can be found in many textbooks, is a comparative methodology. However, with this approach we have to be careful children do not overgeneralise.

## **5 Previous Research**

There has been very little extensive research on intercultural competence in lower grades of primary school. Brym (2004) wanted to examine some of the images learners associated with a foreign country. For that purpose she used the “flying carpet” technique. Students were first introduced to the activity, then they were asked to imagine they were flying on a carpet above the foreign country and then to note down their free associations. Another activity used in the same research was “sending cultural presents”. In this activity students were asked to imagine they were sending to their peers in the target country things they could be interested in and could not get there. These kind of activities can help us learn how children perceive the target

country and to what extent they are able to relativise their own and foreign culture (Šenjug Golub, 2013). This activity was adapted and used in the study presented in this paper.

Aijala (2009) conducted a study on intercultural competence in Finnish national state exams. She found that attitudes as one of the components of intercultural competence can be examined by situational questions, essays and objective type questions. Although some of the exam types are not suitable for children, even students in lower grades of primary school can do tasks dealing with imaginary situations, where they have to answer some situational questions (Šenjug Golub, 2013). This fact was taken into account when designing the instrument used in the study presented in this paper.

Mihaljević Djigunović (1993) researched attitudes young learners in grades 1 and 4 of primary school had towards native speakers. She found that most young learners in the beginning had positive or neutral feelings towards native speakers, but after three years of learning the language, more learners showed positive attitudes, whereas the number of students showing neutral attitude decreased.

Furthermore, Pachevska (2003) researched the connection of the process of foreign language learning with knowledge, prejudice and stereotypes. She found that foreign language classes cannot help overcome prejudice, but the more one knows about a foreign country, the less likely they are to have prejudice against it (as cited in Šenjug-Golub, 2013).

Šenjug (2008) researched attitudes of students in grades 5 to 8 towards native speakers of German. In her research she found that students in grade 5 were less prone to prejudice than students in other grades.

Filipan-Žiganić (2008) carried out a study on cultural knowledge about English and German speaking countries in Croatian primary school students. The participants were 847 fifth-grade learners of English and German. The assumption of the study was that the development of intercultural competence was closely linked to cultural content taught in class. The results showed significant deficiencies in the participants' knowledge, which led Filipan-Žiganić to conclude cultural content was neglected in foreign language teaching.

Šenjug-Golub (2013) conducted a study on 37 classes in 13 primary schools in Croatia. She compared 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade primary school learners of German who had been studying German from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. She found that the 4<sup>th</sup> graders were more open and curious towards members of the target culture than the 8<sup>th</sup> graders. She also found that learners with better grades in German were more open and curious towards members of the target culture and had more knowledge of the culture, but were not necessarily less prone to stereotypes.

## **6 The Study**

### ***6.1 Aim***

The aim of the study was to examine perceptions of intercultural competence in primary school children. There has not been much research on intercultural competence in children, neither in the world nor in Croatia, so one of the goals of the study was to learn whether learners of English in lower grades of primary school were aware of it, what it meant for them and why, if at all, they thought intercultural competence was important. It is expected that this study would give an insight into the way children think about English and its culture, as well as how they perceive differences between cultures, if they are aware of them.

### ***6.2 Sample***

Participants in this study were fourth grade students of a primary school in Croatia. The sample included two classes of students, the total of 37 male and female participants around the age of 10. They had all been learning English at school since the first grade, and some of them took English classes at kindergarten. Participants at the age of 10 were chosen because they are naturally open and curious. Also, according to some researchers, this is the ideal age for developing some aspects of intercultural competence, as children that age are cognitively mature enough to understand certain aspects of intercultural competence, such as the concept of a foreigner (Wiegand, 1992).

### ***6.3 Instrument and Procedure***

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. Some of the questions were taken and adapted from the instruments used in the studies by Šenjug-Golub (2008; 2013), Brym (2004) and Pachevska (2003), such as Brym's 'flying carpet technique' and 'sending cultural presents'. The questionnaire consisted of four parts – the introductory part and three sets of open-ended questions on imaginary situations. The introductory part included questions about learners' age, English learning experience, trips to other countries and the

importance of English. In the next three sets of questions learners were asked to imagine three different situations and answer questions about them.

In the first set of questions (see [appendix](#)) the participants were asked to imagine a boy or a girl from England/the USA. They had to think of his/her name, what they looked like, where they lived, what their typical day and their school looked like and what they liked doing in their free time. They were also asked if they thought there was anything different about his/her life, compared with their own lives. In the second set of questions (see [appendix](#)) the participants were asked to imagine they met a boy or a girl from England/the USA. They were then asked whether they would invite them to stay with them during school breaks, what they thought would be strange or different to them in Croatia, what they thought they would like to see and which places to visit. In the last question of this set, the participants were asked whether they thought there was anything their new friend would miss about Croatia when he/she went back and what it would be. In the last set of questions (see [appendix](#)) the participants were asked to imagine they got a chance to visit England/the USA. They were then asked what would be unusual to them there, whether they would know how to play with kids there and what they would miss when they got back. They were also asked if they thought there was anyone else they knew who would find their way around more easily when abroad and why. At the end of each section participants were asked if they thought what they had been asked was important for them to know and why. That part of the questionnaire examined their perception and awareness of importance of the topic.

Since children would not understand the concept of intercultural competence described by scientific definitions and models, the questionnaire was adapted to their level of knowledge and way of thinking. While designing it, we kept in mind how intercultural competence would function if it were adapted to children's abilities, knowledge, interests and needs; i.e. what it would mean for children to be interculturally competent. The assumption was that at that age, children's lives revolve around their family, friends, school and play and that they are interested in lives of other children their age, as well as in their schools and hobbies. English textbooks for that age range had been examined before compiling the questionnaire, in order to see which topics were covered in them. It was expected that textbooks deal with the topics students could relate to and would be interested to learn about. They included topics from everyday life such as food, school, free time, hobbies, and stories about peers. Most of the textbooks also included cultural corners with texts about English-speaking countries, tourist attractions, food or geography.

The study was conducted by interviewing each student individually. The participants were asked questions from the questionnaire and their answers were written down. The questionnaire, as well as the interviews, was in Croatian, due to the participants' insufficient knowledge to express themselves accurately and naturally in English. Therefore, the participants' answers were given in Croatian.

## **6.4 Results**

### **6.4.1 Introductory Part**

In the introductory part (see [appendix](#)) the participants were asked about their previous English learning experience (whether they learned English before school), contact with other cultures (whether they had ever been to any other country or whether they had relatives/friends abroad) and the importance of speaking English (why is English important for them to know).

#### *Question 1: Previous English learning experience*

Most of the participants (21/37) started learning English before school. They mainly started learning English in kindergarten. Four participants (4/21) said they had been learning it at home, with their older siblings or with parents. Twenty-eight participants (28/37) stated someone at home spoke English.

#### *Question 2: Contact with other languages and cultures*

Nineteen participants (19/37) had relatives or friends abroad, mostly in Germany or Austria. However, it is unlikely the participants communicate with their relatives in English; they most probably use Croatian or German. There were only few participants (5/37) who said they had friends or family in Canada, the UK or Australia. Less than half participants (16/37) stated they had been abroad, mostly on vacation or to visit their friends and relatives in the neighbouring countries and Germany. None of the participants have ever been to an English-speaking country.

#### *Question 3: The importance of English*

In the question on the importance of English, almost all of the participants, except for one (36/37), agreed it was important to know English. The participants were then asked why English was important to know. Some of the reasons for learning English that were listed by the participants were: communication with tourists, reading in English, getting a job more easily, playing video games in English, being able to go and work in other countries or being able to communicate with people when visiting England. Several participants said it was

important to speak English because many people spoke it, everything was in English and it was the most important language, since you could use it in many other countries. One of the participants emphasised that England was very powerful and that was why we needed to know English. He also said <sup>[1]</sup> *To je službeni jezik i cijeli svijet ga treba znati. Nama treba da se razumijemo s drugim ljudima.*

[“It is the ‘official’ language and the whole world needs to speak it so we can talk to other people who do not speak our language.”]

It was also evident that many students who participated in this study associated English with business and obtaining better paid jobs. One of the participants said <sup>[2]</sup> *Trebaš znati engleski da možeš dobiti bolji posao i veću plaću.* [“You need to know English so you could get a better job and higher salary.”]

Several other participants emphasised that people needed to know as many languages as possible to get a good job. Many of the participants also watch TV series and cartoons in English or surf the Internet. Some of the other answers on the importance of English were:

<sup>[3]</sup> *...jer su skoro sve serije na engleskom, jer je zabavno.*

<sup>[4]</sup> *...sve na internetu je na engleskom, možeš pričati s ljudima diljem svijeta na engleskom.*

<sup>[5]</sup> *...pola svijeta ga priča.*

<sup>[3]</sup> [“... because almost all TV series are in English and because it is fun.”]

<sup>[4]</sup> [“...because everything on the Internet is in English and you can talk to people from all over the world in English.”]

<sup>[5]</sup> [“...because half of the world speaks it.”]

#### **6.4.2 The First Set of Questions**

##### *Question 1: The boy's/girl's name*

In the first set of questions (see [appendix](#)), the participants were first asked to think of a name for their imaginary friend from the UK/the USA. Most of the students (25/37) thought of an English name. Some of those names were inspired by the names of the characters in their English textbook (Tom and Melanie). Six participants (6/37) chose typical Croatian names such as Ivan, Dario and Luka, while the rest of the participants (6/37) decided on the names which could be either English or Croatian, such as Toni, David and Laura.

##### *Question 2: Physical appearance*

The next question in the first set was about the physical appearance of the imaginary girl/boy. The participants were asked what their imaginary friend looked like and whether he/she was in any way different from them. Eighteen participants (18/37) described nothing significantly different in the boy's/girl's appearance; their imaginary characters had different hair colour, some were taller or older than them, wore different hairstyles, were skinnier than them or had different eye colour, but they looked like any other of their friends. However, nineteen participants (19/37) said the boy/girl they imagined was somehow different from them. They usually singled out different skin colour, in more cases darker and in some lighter than theirs. Some participants also emphasised that they spoke English and not Croatian and they did not live in Croatia.

### *Question 3: Housing*

They were then asked about the places the boy/girl they imagined lived in; where they lived, with whom they lived and what their homes looked like. Seventeen participants (17/37) described their homes as any other house/flat in Croatia. They usually said they lived with their parents, only one participant mentioned grandparents. Some participants (13/37) also mentioned where geographically their imaginary friends lived, most often they named the country (England or America), and if they named the town it was usually London. Some of the other places the participants named were Oxford, Washington, New York and Texas. There was also one participant who said the boy lived in Swansea and he chose that town because he had seen it in a video game. Another participant imagined his friend from England living just next to 'the big wheel' (the London Eye), so he could go for a ride every day. Twenty participants (20/37) described the places their imaginary friends lived in as being different from their homes. They imagined the boy/girl lived in a one-storey house (which is not that common in Croatia), that their houses were very colourful, each room was painted in a different colour and in one case all the rooms were painted in blue. There were also some imaginative answers – one participant said the house did not look different from the outside, but had a buffet inside, and another participant imagined the boy lived with the Simpsons. From the answers of fourteen participants (14/20) it was evident they imagined the boy/girl living in big, modern houses/flats equipped with all kinds of technology. Very often they said they lived in very big, nicely decorated houses. Some mentioned big yards, three storey houses, flat screens covering one whole wall and flats in buildings bigger than any building in Croatia. Some of those descriptions were:

<sup>[6]</sup> *Živi u Americi, u kući, jako uređenoj. Lijepo izgleda, ima veliki plazma TV skoro preko cijelog zida. Ima ogromnu sobu s PlayStationom, mobitelom, tabletom, laptopom.*

<sup>[7]</sup> *...u Americi su moderniji stanovi, imaju iPad-ove, a kod nas toga još nema.*

<sup>[8]</sup> *...kuće su veće jer su Amerikanci bogatiji.*

<sup>[9]</sup> *Živi u vili. Vila je velika, ima pet kata, svatko ima svoju sobu. Njegova soba ima plavu boju, oni imaju lijepe stepenice iznutra, ima bazen u sobi.*

<sup>[10]</sup> *Kuća je u centru grada, lijepo je vani sređena, roze je boje i ima veliko dvorište.*

<sup>[6]</sup> [“He lives in America, in a nicely done and decorated house. There is a flat screen TV covering almost one whole wall. There is also a huge room with PlayStation, tablets and laptops.”]

<sup>[7]</sup> [“...in America flats are more modern than here, for example they have iPads and we do not have them here yet.”]

<sup>[8]</sup> [“...houses in America are bigger, because the Americans are richer.”]

<sup>[9]</sup> [“He lives in a big five storey villa with a beautiful staircase inside, everyone has their own room. His room is blue and he also has a private pool in his room.”]

<sup>[10]</sup> [“The house is in the town centre, it is nicely decorated and pink, it has a big front yard.”]

However, when asked if everyone there had such a house/flat, the participants showed they understood not everyone there had a lot of money and there were also people who were not so rich or even poor people. Also, one participant built a whole story about the place where his imaginary character lived:

<sup>[11]</sup> *Živi u kući u Teksasu. Kuća je od drva, drukčija je po tome jer živi u Teksasu. Tamo je jako vruće i ima prašina po cesti. On živi u gradu, okolo je pustinja.*

<sup>[11]</sup> [“He lives in Texas, in a house made of wood. It is different from where I live because he lives in Texas where it is very hot and there is a lot of dust on the road. He lives in a town and there is a dessert that surrounds the town.”]

#### *Question 4: A day in life*

In the next question the participants were asked to describe a day in the boy's/girl's life; the food they usually ate, what their school looked like, how they spent their free time, what kind of games they played.

#### *Question 4a: Food*



Most of the participants (23/37) named the food they themselves usually ate every day (cereals, jam, Nutella, sandwich, fried eggs, pancakes; soup, stew, meat and potatoes for lunch, even some traditional Croatian meals like “purica s mlincima”). Only six participants (6/20) said food was different in some way. Four of them (4/6) thought they ate unhealthy food in England/the USA – lots of pizza and hamburgers and more junk food in general. One student said the boy ate something from the vending machine for lunch because their vending machines offered bigger choice of food, and for dinner he had crisps and coca cola, while playing video games. Two participants (2/6) believed there had to be something different they ate, some traditional meals which people in Croatia do not know about.

#### *Question 4b: School*

In the next question, participants were asked to describe the boy’s/girl’s school. Almost everyone (34/37) described their schools as different. Some participants remembered yellow school bus because they had seen it in movies or video games and one participant said the bus was red and called double-decker, because they had learned about it in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. One girl even noticed yellow buses had only one door, unlike ours, and she noticed that while watching *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. Half of those participants who thought school was different (17/34), believed English/American schools were bigger (because there were more students) and in many cases better equipped. They also agreed their imaginary friends did not learn Croatian and had some different school subjects, while few believed they could take Croatian as an elective course. Few participants remembered things like uniforms, different school clubs such as cheerleading, football different from Croatian football and spelling bees. A couple of participants gave completely different and imaginative answers, such as that the school was <sup>[12]</sup>*dugačka kao tvornica* [“long as a factory”] and <sup>[13]</sup>*izgleda k'o bus* [it looked “like a bus”]. Some other answers were:

<sup>[14]</sup> *Škola je izvana narančasta, unutra ima jednu sobu u kojoj se pod odmorom možeš igrati na kompu. Nemaju kuhinju nego restoran u kojem možeš naručiti što želiš.*

<sup>[15]</sup> *...imaju bolja računala od nas, bolje je uređena škola. Imaju više kreativnih učenika, talentiraniji su jer je Amerika najnaprednija država.*

<sup>[14]</sup> [“Their school is orange from the outside. Inside there is a room in which there are computers and you can play there during recess. They don’t have a school kitchen but a restaurant in which you can order whatever you want.”]

[15] [“They have better computers at school than us, the school looks nicer and their students are more creative because America is the most progressive country.”]

#### *Question 5: Free time*

When asked how their imaginary friends spent their free time and what kind of games they played, 24 participants (24/37) described games and activities they themselves usually do/play. However, 13 participants (13/37) named some different activities and games such as camping, American football, “riding on the London Eye”, playing basketball “because the Americans are famous for it”, or they believed that, along those we played, there had to be some games with different rules or some completely different games, even if they did not know about them. The games they most often mentioned the boy/girl played were the ones they themselves play very often – hide and seek, tag, dodgeball, hopscotch and some sports.

At the end of this set of questions, the participants were asked whether they thought what they had been asked was important for them to know, and if yes, why. There were 12 participants (12/37) who thought all of this was not important for them to know and it could not be useful to them in any way. Among the rest of the participants there were some (14/37) who thought it was important for personal reasons – it was good to know all of this to know them better as friends, so they could help them if they needed any help, so they knew who the person was if they were to meet, to know where and how their friends lived; while for others it had some sort of cultural meaning that implied intercultural awareness or some aspects of intercultural competence. Answers of eleven participants (11/37) reflected awareness of some aspects of intercultural competence. These were the main reasons the participants named when asked about the importance of the first set of questions:

[16] *...da bi znali sve točno, ako se preselimo da se lakše prilagodimo.*

[17] *Lijepo je znati o drugim zemljama. Kad dođemo negdje da vidimo kako se igraju, pa se tu igramo sa svojim prijateljima.*

[18] *Ako otiđemo u Ameriku da znaš kako se svi ponašaju i da se navikneš na to.*

[19] *Ako bi otišao tamo[zamišljeni dječak] da zna kako oni žive.*

[20] *Ako im dođemo u posjet da se ne zbunim što to oni rade nego da znamo, i da mi to radimo.*

[21] *Da znamo kako Engleska izgleda, da kad dođe tamo [on=zamišljeni dječak] da se ne iznenadi kakve su kuće, što se igraju i što uče.*

[16] [“If we move there and we know all of this, we will adapt more easily.”]

[17] [“It is nice to know about other countries. We can go there and see what they like to play and when we come back we can show our friends how to play like that.”]

[18] [“If we ever go to America, we will already know how they behave and we will be used to it.”]

[19] [“It is important to know how they live if he [the boy] goes there.”]

[20] [“If we come to visit, we will not be surprised or confused about what they are doing and we will be able to do the same thing as they are doing.”]

[21] [“All of this is important to know so that he [the boy] knows what England looks like, so that when he comes there he is not surprised by their houses, games or school.”]

### ***6.4.3 The Second Set of Questions***

In the second set of questions (see [appendix](#)) the participants were asked to imagine they met an English/American boy or girl. They were then asked if they would invite him/her to visit them in Croatia, what they might find different or unusual here, what they would be interested to see and where they would take them. They were also asked what they would send them when they returned home, and it had to be something they would not be able to find at home. Finally, they were asked whether all of this was important for them to know and if yes, why.

#### *Question 1: Willingness to invite foreign friends for a visit*

Almost all the participants, except for one (36/37), would be willing to invite their foreign friend to spend holidays with them in Croatia. Reasons for that ranged from personal to cultural. The participants whose answers belong to the category of personal reasons said they would invite them over to play with them because they liked them, they were nice, they got on well, they were friends and similar. However, 20 participants (20/36) named reasons which could be classified as cultural or intercultural, which showed intercultural awareness. They wanted to invite their foreign friends to Croatia to show them what was different in Croatia, to find out more about life in their country, to tell them about life here and show them some famous places, or just because they thought it would be fun to learn something new from them.

#### *Question 2: Cultural differences*

In the next question participants were asked what their foreign friends would find unusual or different in Croatia. Only two participants (2/37) thought there would not be anything unusual for their friends in Croatia and that they would not be surprised by anything. Among the

things they thought would be unusual for their foreign friends were food, school, towns, people, nature and language. Some participants believed they would be surprised by people in Croatia driving on the right side of the road, the fact that <sup>[22]</sup> *nemamo teksaških renđera* [“we do not have Texas rangers here”], everything being much more expensive and by the lack of choice in stores because <sup>[23]</sup> *oni imaju svega u većim količinama* [“they have everything in larger quantities”] and <sup>[24]</sup> *mi smo siromašniji od Amerikanaca* [“we are poorer than the Americans”], as well as by our culture and some holiday customs. Our towns would also be different for them because we do not have that many cars or traffic, and their cars are also more modern. Since they have much more traffic, their roads are wider. According to what participants said, our towns and houses were generally smaller, there were not that many shops and we did not have terrace houses or many tall buildings. Although our houses are smaller, we have more space for playing and big vegetable gardens next to our homes, which would surprise their foreign friends. Some participants (19/35) thought their foreign friend would be surprised by our food. In the participants’ opinion, they eat much more hamburgers in England/the USA, have bigger breakfast and often eat scrambled eggs and bacon (they said they learn about it in English every year), while we most often eat salami and bread for breakfast. They also often eat ready meals, while we cook every day. Some participants also thought they ate a lot of sushi there and they would be surprised we did not have it here. They were also convinced in England/the USA they did not eat some vegetables (peas, beans, kale), or some desserts like *Mađarica* and <sup>[25]</sup> *torta Ruska salata, jer su daleko od Mađarske i nikad nisu probali ta jela* [“since they live far away from those countries and did not have a chance to try them”]. Others believed there was some different or traditional food, but they could not say which exactly. Along with towns and food, the biggest number of participants (19/35) thought our schools would be new and different to their English friends, mostly because of the different language we spoke, the school subjects, smaller buildings and less modern look and equipment. A couple of participants mentioned they might not have two shifts at school, while few participants (3/35) remembered uniforms and yellow buses we did not have.

### *Question 3: Interesting places/things to see in Croatia*

When they were asked where they would take their friend, most of the participants (32/37) thought their friends would be interested to see tourist attractions like Plitvice Lakes and other national parks, Zagreb, the seaside, old churches. However, there were some other suggestions like shopping centres – because “ours are smaller than theirs”, schools and cinema in their town – <sup>[26]</sup> *jer mi ovdje u kinu u Zelini imamo drvene stolice, a u Americi su*

*velike i udobne* [because “here in our town we have wooden chairs in cinema, and in America they have big, comfortable chairs”]. Only one participant thought they would be interested in our food and clothes, because they wore different, less casual clothes. Some of the other suggestions were woods (because “they do not have them”), our cars, the sea and <sup>[27]</sup> *spomenari* [“memory books”].

#### *Question 4: Sending presents*

In the next question the participants were asked what they would send to their international friends back home, and it had to be something they could not find in England/the USA. Eight participants (8/37) thought their friends would not miss anything when they returned back home. The most common answers among the rest of the participants (20/37) were souvenirs such as t-shirts, postcards, pictures, licitar hearts and magnets. Eleven participants (11/37) would send a toy to their friend – traditional Croatian wooden toys, a handmade doll – <sup>[28]</sup> *nemaju takve kvalitetne lutke, tamo je većina plastičnih, duže bi joj trajala* [because “they only have plastic ones that are not of very good quality, this one would last longer”], Croatian soccer ball, computer games they cannot get at home. Few participants would send some food they in their opinion did not have in the USA/England – lamb’s lettuce, different shapes of pasta, beans, “mađarica” and goulash. A couple of participants thought they would miss their new friends from Croatia, so they would send a friendship bracelet, while another two (2/37) thought they would miss the hills and surroundings, but that would be impossible to send.

#### *Question 5: The importance of the questions*

In the last question of this set, participants were asked on the importance of what they had been asked in this set of questions. They were asked whether they thought it was important to know how other children outside Croatia lived, whether it was important for them to know what their friend from abroad might find unusual or different and what they might be interested to see here. There were ten participants (10/37) who thought what they had been asked was not important and two participants (2/37) who felt it was important but could not say why. The rest of the participants (25/37) thought it was important for various, mostly cultural reasons: so they would know what to show to and where to take their friends when they came to Croatia, to be aware there were some things that are different here, to learn what life there was like, to know what they ate and what their school was like if they ever moved there, because some things might be different or work differently and they might be surprised, because their foreign friends are not used to life in Croatia and we could prepare them for those differences. Some of the other answers were:

<sup>[29]</sup> ... jer možda takve stvari nema tamo, da se možemo prilagoditi tome kako je kod nje, da se ne osjeća kao da je negdje drugdje.

<sup>[30]</sup> Važno je da vidimo kako oni to imaju i da oni vide naše, da se družimo i da vidimo što je isto.

<sup>[31]</sup> ..da znamo kako se ponašati u Engleskoj ako dođemo.

<sup>[32]</sup> ...da zna kako izgleda naša zemlja, da može drugima pričati da i oni znaju, da se ne iznenadi kad dođe kako mi govorimo, kako nam izgledaju kuće, ceste, dvorišta, prijatelji.

<sup>[29]</sup> [“...because she might not have that kind of things at home, so we could try to adapt to that and make her feel at home.”]

<sup>[30]</sup> [“It is important that they see what we have and how we do things here. We can then together see if there is something similar in how they do it.”]

<sup>[31]</sup> [It is important to spend time with international friends “because we can learn from them how to behave in England when we go there.”]

<sup>[32]</sup> [“...when they go back they can tell their friends about Croatia and what things look like here, so when they come to visit their friends are not surprised by the look of our houses, roads, yards...”]

There were also three participants (3/37) whose answers on importance did not show cultural or intercultural awareness, they thought what they had been asked was just for fun or it was important only so they could tell their friends what it was like later.

#### **6.4.4 The Third Set of Questions**

In the last set of questions (see [appendix](#)) participants were asked to imagine the opposite situation – that they were given a chance to visit England/the USA. They were then asked what they thought they would find unusual or different there, whether they would know to play with other children there, what they would miss when they returned home.

##### *Question 1: Willingness and reasons to visit the UK/the USA*

The participants were first asked if they would take the chance and go to England/the USA. Only two participants said they would not go. All the other participants (35/37) said they would go, for different reasons – some to see famous towns and places like London, Tower Bridge and the London Eye, and others because they were interested to see what everything there was like, to try different food, meet new people, to see what their schools and houses

looked like and what was different. One participant also said <sup>[35]</sup>*U Ameriku bih išla da vidim njihovu novu tehnologiju, oni imaju najnapredniju i tamo se prvo pojavu. Htjela bih vidjeti i Englesku, htjela bih vidjeti kako je živjeti u državi koja je na otoku.* [“I would go to America to see the latest technology we do not have here yet, they have the most advanced technology and they always have it first. I would like to visit England as well, to see what it is like to live in a country situated on an island”]. Another participant said <sup>[36]</sup>*Htjela bi otići u njihov McDonald’s jer su tam’ puno bolji hamburgeri i pomfri* [“I would like to go to their McDonald’s because their hamburgers and French fries are much better.”]

### *Question 2: Cultural differences*

In the next question they were asked what they might find unusual or different in England/the USA. There were only two participants (2/37) who thought there would be nothing unusual for them there. The most common answer among those who thought there would be something different referred to school (17/35). They generally thought English/American schools were nicer, bigger and more modern. Some mentioned yellow buses, uniforms, lockers, different subjects (the fact they do not learn Croatian at school) and only one shift. Fourteen participants (14/35) thought food would be different but in most cases they did not know which food exactly. Some participants (4/14) thought they would be surprised with the quantity of fast food they ate there and some said they would not like it because there would not be any home-grown food; while others thought English/American hamburgers were somehow better and tastier. A number of participants (14/35) also believed English/American towns were bigger, with more buildings than houses, nicer cars and richer people, as well as that they did not have many villages or woods. People would also be unusual to them, mostly because they speak another language or because of the British accent. One participant singled out their way of dressing – she was convinced they wore more colourful clothes than people in Croatia and girls wore only dresses. Another participant said that everyone had darker skin because it was warmer there (she said she had seen that on the news). Some participants (11/35) mentioned some cultural aspects they would be surprised with, such as different customs, different holidays, the Queen’s guard in London and the fact that they have a queen in the UK.

### *Question 3: Games*

Twelve participants (12/35) thought the games children played in England/the USA were the same and they believed they would know how to play with them. There were thirteen participants (13/35) who thought the games were a bit different, with different names or slight

rule changes, but they thought they would still know how to play them, especially if the rules were explained to them. For example, one participant said they had a game called <sup>[35]</sup>*brojanje ovci* [“sheep counting”] which they played when they could not fall asleep. He was not sure what the rules were, but he said he would know how to play it if someone explained it to him. The rest of the participants (12/35) believed there were some different games and they would not know how to play them. Most of them could not say which games exactly those were, but they were convinced there had to be some. Few participants (3/12) remembered baseball and football – <sup>[36]</sup>*nogomet koji ima drugačiju loptu i moraju se gurati* [“football played with a differently shaped ball, where you have to push your team players”], while some individuals believed they did not play <sup>[37]</sup>*učitelja i učiteljice* [“school and teachers] or there were some different board games.

#### *Question 4: Receiving presents*

In the next question, the participants were asked to imagine they received a present from England/the UK, something they missed from there and they could not find in Croatia. Participants could give more answers to this question. Just like in the previous set of questions, the greatest number of participants (13/32) said they would like to receive some kind of a souvenir from England/the USA. Twelve participants (12/32) said they would miss things which could be categorised as “lifestyle”, such as nicer cars, <sup>[38]</sup>*dućani s lijepom odjećom* [“stores with nice clothes”], the newest mobile phones, <sup>[39]</sup>*bolju satelitsku s više programa* [“better cable TV with more channels”], the way people lived there, some tourist attractions such as London Eye, <sup>[40]</sup>*ulična košarka na svakom ćošku* [“street basketball on every corner”], and in general <sup>[41]</sup>*modernost koju Hrvatska još nema* [“the kind of modernity that Croatia does not have yet”]. Some said they would like to be sent food or food recipes, for example American pancakes recipe, their candies, because <sup>[42]</sup>*mi nemamo bombone s tako puno aroma i okusa* [“we do not have them in so many different aromas and flavours”], <sup>[43]</sup>*smokiće od čokolade* [“chocolate flips”], <sup>[44]</sup>*bolji hot dog* [better hot dog] and <sup>[45]</sup>*bomboni od kukuruza* [“corn candy”] (the participant said she had read about it somewhere). There were five participants (5/32) who mentioned toys they would like to get from the USA/England. Some of their wishes were <sup>[46]</sup>*lopta za ragbi i palica za hokej* [“a rugby ball and a hockey bat”], <sup>[47]</sup>*legići jer ih ima puno više, jer se tamo proizvode* [Legos – “since they are made there, there are more different kinds of them”], 3D puzzles which we also have here, but <sup>[48]</sup>*možda oni imaju kvalitetnije* [“theirs might be of better quality”]. Other things very few participants mentioned they would miss were books and picture books in English, photos,



friends and school. There were also five participants (5/37) who said that they would not miss/would not want to receive anything.

*Question 5: The importance of the questions*

Finally, participants were asked whether they thought it was important for them to know all of this about children coming from England/the USA and why it was important for them to meet children from other countries. When asked about the importance of this set of questions, only one participant thought it was not important. Some participants (12/36) thought it was important because it was fun, because they would learn the language better, they would have more friends and gain more knowledge or because they would have something to write about in a school essay. However, there were 24 participants (24/36) whose answers on the importance showed some kind of cultural awareness. Some of those answers were:

<sup>[49]</sup>*Važno je putovati i upoznati drugu djecu da bi se lakše igrali i sporazumjeli, da vidimo neku djecu kako oni žive. Važno je naučiti neke stvari npr. u Engleskoj pa bi se bolje snašao kad bi kasnije išao u Francusku, ne bi se toliko iznenadio, iako svugdje ima nešto novo.*

<sup>[50]</sup>*Kad upoznamo puno više djece znamo što im može smetati, a što ne može; i možemo se lakše sporazumjeti s nekom drugom djecom (npr neka hrana na koju nisu naučeni ili su alergični na nešto što tu ima a tamo nema.*

<sup>[51]</sup>*Važno je putovati da imamo puno iskustva, da nam nije drugačije ako idemo u Englesku živjeti.*

<sup>[52]</sup>*Jer treba upoznavati druge dijelove svijeta, treba vidjeti kako drugi ljudi žive a ne samo kako mi živimo*

<sup>[53]</sup>*Da vidim kako je u drugim zemljama, kako se živi. Naučio bi kako oni to rade pa da drugi put sve znam i da se mogu snaći ili kad oni dođu da znam.*

<sup>[54]</sup>*Zato da bi se ta djeca tu ugodnije osjećala*

<sup>[49]</sup> [“It is important to travel and meet other kids so we learn to communicate and play with them more easily. It is important to know about England, it could be helpful if you went to France for example. Even though there is something different about every country, if you know about other countries and their differences, you will not be so surprised by the things that are different in England.”]

[<sup>50</sup>] [“When we meet some other kids we get to know what they might find inappropriate or unusual (for example some food they are not familiar with) and then the next time we know how to approach either them, or some other kids [from other countries].”]

[<sup>51</sup>] [“Travelling is important because you gain some experience and then if you move to England not everything looks so weird to you.”]

[<sup>52</sup>]“...because you need to get to know other parts of the world and to see how other people live, instead of knowing only about your way of life.”

[<sup>53</sup>] [“...I would learn how people in other countries live and what it is like there. I would learn how they do some things and the next time I would know to do them myself. And if those kids came here, I would know to do it.”]

[<sup>54</sup>] [“[It is important to know all of this]...to make those children feel comfortable here.”]

#### *Question 6: Finding one's way around*

In the very last question participants were asked if they knew someone who would find their way around more easily when abroad. They were also asked if someone who travelled more would be in a better position and if yes, why. In most cases (27/37) the participants believed that someone who spoke English better would find their way around more easily when abroad. In other words, they thought knowing English was the most important. Thirteen participants (13/37) agreed that someone who travelled more would find their way more easily, [<sup>55</sup>]*jer netko tko je bio već u nekoj drugoj zemlji znao bi se malo bolje snaći – jer je vidio je svašta što nema u njegovoj državi* [because “they have already seen many things we do not have here”], [<sup>56</sup>]*onaj tko je putovao je sigurno već probavao objasniti nekom pa zna kako mora objasniti da bi uspio i kako ne smije, taj bi se dobro snašao* [because “they have already tried to explain something to someone who is not from their country so they know what they should or should not say”] or simply because they had more experience and would not find differences so surprising. Eleven participants (11/37) also believed you had to have the right kind of personality for it – they thought someone who was more communicative and self-confident, adapted easily, with better social skills, less shy, with better orientation skills, or someone who tried very hard would find their way in a foreign country more easily.

## 7 Discussion

From this research study it is clear that children still do not have enough knowledge of the world to be able to understand the concept of intercultural competence in the adults' terms. Most of the participants talked about England and America and used those terms interchangeably. Some even talked about tourist attractions that were not English/American (for example, a participant said she would like to go to England to see the Eiffel tower and Gardaland). However, although they have limited knowledge of the English-speaking countries, there are some aspects of intercultural competence which can be developed in children and which should be encouraged. They can easily learn about it if the concept is adapted to their level of knowledge and their understanding of the world. Therefore, they can learn about it even if they are not explicitly told it is "intercultural competence" they are learning about.

Almost all the participants (36/37) were aware of the importance of English in today's world, not just for their needs (playing, having fun), but also the importance of English for their future lives (for example, getting a job – see answer 2). This says a lot about the role of English in today's society. Answers to the question about physical appearance of the imagined boy/girl were possibly inspired by the characters in their textbook – for example, one of the characters in the textbook is black so it is possible some children perceive a prototypical English person as black. Also, based on the majority of answers, we could argue that some participants' prototypical native speaker of English is rich, lives in a big and nice house and goes to a well-equipped school. However, for some students England/America might present an imaginary country to which they project all their wishes and fantasies. Their assumptions about those countries might not be based on any knowledge or facts, their answers might simply reflect their imagination. For example, some participants imagined colourful houses and all kinds of technology available to them (answers 6, 7). They described their foreign friend living with the Simpson family, unusually shaped schools and houses (answers 12, 13), snacks with all the possible flavours (answers 42, 43). Others remembered bits and pieces about England/the United States, but did not have a clear picture of them. Majority of the participants perceived the importance of given aspects of intercultural competence. The main reasons they named when asked about the importance of the questions they had been asked were being able to adapt to a different lifestyle abroad, making others feel comfortable in Croatia and not being surprised or confused by different customs or

behaviours abroad. Almost all children showed awareness of differences and were interested in showing their foreign friends things and places in Croatia. They also showed openness in making friends with them and curiosity about differences in their countries. They had talked in class about some aspect of English culture (food, famous landmarks, double decker...), but not all of the participants remembered that. However, they had learned about it from different sources, mostly movies and TV series.

The study has shown children have the skills to interpret and relate, which we can see in the fact that most of the participants were able to compare the two cultures and talk about the differences between them. Almost all of the participants showed interest in the topic, participated in conversation and showed openness and curiosity. They were able to decentre and look at their culture from the perspective of the other (the imaginary friend from abroad). At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, as predicted by the National Framework Curriculum, students are expected to recognise different values such as friendship, altruism and tolerance, react positively to new situations and notice differences illustrated by basic examples. The participants showed all of this by reacting positively to the imaginary situation of meeting foreign friends, being open to inviting them to visit them in Croatia and being friendly with them. The participants who believed there were some differences showed the ability to understand the concept of the other. By reporting what would be unusual to them abroad or to their foreign friends in Croatia, the participants demonstrated the ability to interpret and interact. There were some stereotypes present, which point to the influence of the environment, especially the media. However, none of them were negative.

In the first set of questions there were more participants who did not think what they had been asked was important (12/37). Also, when compared to the other two sets of questions, in the first set there were fewer participants who thought it was important on cultural level (11/37). However, their perception changed in the next two sets when situational questions involved them directly, i.e. when they were asked about hypothetical personal experiences.

## 8 Conclusion

Just like the perception of the world around them, children's perception of intercultural competence is different from adults' perception. Things that matter to them and things that they are mostly occupied with are their friends, family, school and play. In this study, meeting new friends from England/the USA, playing with them, finding out about their everyday lives and showing them around was children's version of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence in this study represented situations in which children needed to find a way to communicate and play with someone new and different from them, being aware of those differences and being able to see them from the other's perspective. At the age of 10 children are able to understand the world around them up to a point, as the ideas, beliefs and images they associate with England/the USA and their culture are not fully formed or clear. That is understandable considering how much knowledge they have about those countries and considering children's cognitive development. We often say children's minds are like sponges, they often pick up things from their environment without questioning them. They form their beliefs based on information they get at school, from their family, friends and the media. However unusual some of children's ideas in this study were, they showed their openness and curiosity. However, none of the participants had negative perception of English/American culture. The variety of their answers to the questions on differences was surprising and some of the answers were very interesting. Judging by their answers most of the participants were aware of cultural differences, i.e. they perceived interculturalism. In this study participants showed the ability to decentre and analyse their culture from the other's point of view. They were also able to compare the two cultures and react positively and openly to them. Therefore, they showed openness and curiosity, and skills of interpreting and relating. Most of them perceived the importance of possessing certain skills and knowledge about the foreign culture, and they named various personal and cultural reasons for it. In the second and third set of questions, over half of the participants' answers on the importance (21;25/37) fall into the category of cultural reasons. The most common cultural reasons were: learning about differences which would help them to adapt to the foreign culture more easily, making their foreign friends comfortable in Croatia, knowing what they would be surprised by or interested to see and gaining more knowledge about other countries and their customs, people and culture. To conclude, children's perception of English culture included both

correct and incorrect, sometimes unexpected, unusual or funny beliefs, which might reflect children's imagination or different influences from their environment. However, most participants showed openness, curiosity and the ability of interpretation. Also, most of the participants perceived that skills and knowledge of various aspects of intercultural competence were important, even though smaller number of them had predominantly personal reasons for that. Children's openness and curiosity should be encouraged and could serve as a good foundation for intercultural learning and skills developing.

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## Sažetak

U Hrvatskoj i u svijetu nema puno sveobuhvatnih istraživanja koja se bave interkulturalnom kompetencijom kod djece. Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je istražiti percepciju interkulturalne kompetencije kod učenika engleskog jezika u osnovnoj školi – što za njih ona znači, jesu li je svjesni i smatraju li je važnom. Istraživanje je provedeno metodom upitnika koji je prilagođen razumijevanju interkulturalne kompetencije kod djece. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 37 učenika četvrtih razreda osnovne škole kojima je engleski prvi strani jezik. Istraživanje je pokazalo da su djeca svjesna određenih kulturalnih razlika te posjeduju predispozicije za razvijanje interkulturalne kompetencije. Također, većina ispitanika percipirala je aspekte interkulturalne kompetencije važnima za njih.

Ključne riječi: interkulturalna kompetencija, djeca, percepcija, engleski, osnovna škola

# Appendix 1

Upitnik

Koliko imaš godina?

Jesi li prije škole učio/la engleski?

Govori li netko od tvojih doma engleski?

Imaš li prijatelje ili rođake u Engleskoj/Americi ili nekoj drugoj zemlji?

Jesi li ikad bio/la u Engleskoj ili Americi ili nekoj drugoj zemlji?

Što misliš zašto je važno znati engleski?

1. Zamisli jednog dječaka ili djevojčicu iz Engleske/Amerike.

Kako se zove?

Kako izgleda, je li po nečemu drugačiji/drugačija od tebe?

Gdje živi? S kim živi? Kakva mu/joj je kuća?

Kako mu/joj izgleda jedan dan? Kad se budi, što i kad jede, kako putuje u školu, što uči u školi, ima li neke drugačije predmete, dokad je u školi? Kako izgleda škola?

Što radi u slobodno vrijeme? Koji su mu/joj hobiji? Što se igra s prijateljima? Jesu li igre drugačije nego kod nas?

Zašto misliš da je važno da znaš to? Zašto je važno znati o drugoj djeci koja žive izvan Hrvatske?

2. Zamisli da na moru ili negdje drugdje upoznaš jednog dječaka ili djevojčicu iz Engleske/Amerike.

Bi li ju pozvao/la kod sebe na praznike i zašto?

Što misliš da bi mu/joj u Hrvatskoj bilo čudno, novo ili nepoznato? (hrana, škola, gradovi, jezik...)

Što misliš da bi ju zanimalo o Hrvatskoj, što bi željela vidjeti?

Da se ta djevojčica vrati u Englesku/Ameriku, što bi joj poslao/la jer misliš da toga nema kod nje, a falilo bi joj? (neka hrana, igračka...)

Zašto misliš da je važno da znaš kako žive djeca izvan Hrvatske, što je kod njih različito, čega nema, što bi im bilo neobično ovdje, što bi ih ovdje zanimalo?

3. Zamisli da dobiješ priliku da ideš posjetiti Englesku/Ameriku. Bi li išao/išla i zašto?

Što misliš da bi ti tamo bilo neobično ili novo? (hrana, škola, igre...)

Misliš li da se tamo igraju iste igre kao što igraju djeca u Hrvatskoj. Bi li se znao igrati s njima?

Kad bi se vratio/la nazad u Hrvatsku što bi volio/voljela dobiti iz Engleske/Amerike, čega tu nema a treba ti ili ti je zanimljivo?

Što misliš zašto je to važno? Zašto je važno upoznati drugu djecu izvan Hrvatske, znati o njihovim igrama, njihovim školama, hrani...?

Ima li u tvom razredu netko tko bi se bolje snašao vani, netko tko je više putovao? Misliš li da njima to što su puno putovali može pomoći da se bolje snađu? Zašto?