

Sveučilište u Zagrebu

Filozofski fakultet

Odsjek za anglistiku

Katedra za metodiku

# **ASPECTS OF EFL LEARNERS' SELF-CONCEPT RELATED TO LANGUAGE APTITUDE**

**Diplomski rad**

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Zagreb, 2018.

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**Graduation thesis**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this research was to investigate secondary school students' self-concepts in the foreign languages context, with the main focus on FL aptitude. Specifically, the aim of the research was to analyse to what extent students believe that they possess an innate 'talent' for acquiring languages, and how they perceive themselves as language learners. Furthermore, the goal was to investigate the relationship between the beliefs of teachers and students about FL aptitude. In other words, the goal was to find out if there would be any differences between the way students perceive their FL aptitude and the way their teachers do. The study was conducted on nine secondary school students and two teachers. The data was collected using a questionnaire administered to the students. It consisted of three sections. The first focused on students' early childhood and personal information. The second section was conceived to investigate student's self-concept of primary and secondary school success, while the third concentrated on extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, the teachers' questionnaire served as an instrument for obtaining data about students' success in the particular subject and their attitude in the classroom. The results showed that there were differences between self-concepts of high-level-, intermediate-level- and low-level-proficiency students, as well as their beliefs about FL aptitude. In fact, high-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency students had more positive language learner self-concepts than low-level-proficiency students did. Also, high-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency students believed that they possessed FL aptitude when it comes to acquiring English language, whereas low-level-proficiency students did not share such belief about themselves. As for teachers, their answers overlapped with those obtained from students: high-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency students believed they were talented in acquiring foreign languages, while low-level-proficiency students claimed they did not possess FL aptitude.

**Key words:** self-concept, foreign language aptitude, self-beliefs, EFL

## **1. Introduction**

We will start by presenting some basic concepts regarding language learner self-concept and foreign language aptitude. It is a known fact that learners vary considerably when it comes to foreign language acquisition. Numerous factors influence the rate of success in acquiring a second language. Learners can differ in terms of their sense of agency, motivation, willingness to engage in activities, types of strategies they employ as well as the degree of self-directedness. Mercer (2011) argues that a key factor contributing to the development of this complexity and variation are the learners' dynamic self-beliefs. Each learner holds their own unique complex set of self-beliefs which influence the way learners choose to act, the interpretation of their past experience and the challenges they set themselves for the future. Fundamentally, learner self-beliefs form the psychological basis for the construction of a broader psychological notion, self-concept. It is defined as one's self-perception in a particular domain. It refers to what one believes about oneself and how one evaluates these beliefs in the domain, such as the domain of Foreign Language Learning. One particular belief in this domain was a primary focus of this study, namely the belief about foreign language aptitude. It could be described as a complex of basic abilities that are essential to facilitate foreign language learning. Thus, the concept concerns a variety of cognitively-based learner differences in the overall capacity to master a foreign language (Dörnyei, 2005).

Therefore, in the theoretical part of the study we will present the notion of language learner self-concept as well as various specific domains that could be found in the self-concept network. Different conceptualizations of FL aptitude will also be described, as well as future directions. The research part of the thesis is organized in several sections concentrating on aims, sample, instruments, procedures, results and discussion. The aim of the study was to investigate to what extent students believe that they possess aptitude for acquiring languages, and how they perceive themselves as language learners. In the concluding part of the paper, we will offer the results of the study, as well as its limitations and possible further research.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1. Individual Differences**

Why is it that some learners differ greatly when it comes to second language acquisition success? Some of the factors that may be accountable for these differences are included under the term of individual differences.

Individual differences (IDs) can be defined as “anything that marks a person as a distinct and unique human being” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 4). When it comes to IDs in language learning, this construct refers to “dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree. In other words, they concern stable and systematic deviations from a normative blueprint” (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 4). Over the last few decades the interest in studying of individual learner differences has evolved. The labels used to describe language learners have radically changed. From being classified as “good and bad, intelligent and dull, motivated and unmotivated, learners are now referred to by a myriad of new terms such as integratively and instrumentally motivated, anxious and comfortable, field independent and field sensitive, auditory and visual” (Horwitz, 2000 as cited in Ellis, 2008, p. 643). In addition, the perspective from which IDs are seen and the purpose of their study have also changed. Early treatments of individual differences were motivated by the need to identify testing instruments that would *predict* which learners would be successful. On the contrary, more recent research has strived to *explain* why some learners succeed more than others. When talking about IDs, Ellis introduces them as factors responsible for individual differences in L2 learning (2008).

What are then the ID factors that SLA researchers have examined? In the next section we present the classification of ID factors comparing various research.

### **2.2. Classification of ID factors**

Among various classifications of ID factors, we decided to present four taxonomies proposed by Skehan (1989), Robinson (2002), Ellis (2004) and Dörnyei (2005) (see table 1). All of these taxonomies include language aptitude, motivation, personality and anxiety in their lists. Therefore, these can be considered as central factors. In addition, there are other factors which are less central and do not appear in the lists of all of these authors, for example, learning strategies, intelligence and working memory.

*Table 1 Factors listed as influencing individual differences in language learning*

Skehan (1989)	Robinson (2002)	Ellis (2004)	Dörnyei (2005)
1. Language aptitude	1. Intelligence	1. Intelligence	1. Personality
2. Motivation	2. Motivation	2. Working memory	2. Language aptitude
3. Language learning strategies	3. Anxiety	3. Language aptitude	3. Motivation
4. Cognitive and affective factors:	4. Language aptitude	4. Learning style	4. Learning and cognitive styles
a) extroversion/ introversion	5. Working memory	5. Motivation	5. Language learning strategies
b) risk-taking	6. Age	6. Anxiety	6. Other learner characteristics:
c) intelligence		7. Personality	a) anxiety
d) field independence		8. Willingness to communicate	b) creativity
e) anxiety		9. Learner beliefs	c) willingness to communicate
		10. Learning strategies	d) self-esteem
			e) learner beliefs

As evident from Table 1, Ellis (2004) and Dörnyei (2005) in their taxonomies list learner beliefs as one of the factors that influence individual differences. According to how ID factors are defined, we may assume that self-concept may be added to the list. As we are going to discuss in the sections that follow, self-concept is a broader construct compared to learner beliefs. Learners differ greatly when it comes to their self-concepts because each one of them has their own unique set of self-beliefs which have an impact on how they perceive themselves not just as students in general, but as foreign language learners as well.

Thus, in the next chapter we will primarily focus our attention on one specific factor, that is, self-concept and its role in foreign language learning.

### **2.3. Language learner self-concept**

In social psychology, the term self-concept is a general term used to refer to how someone thinks about, evaluates or perceives themselves. Baumeister offers his definition which states that the self-concept is “the individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is” (as cited in McLeod, 2008, para. 2). For the purpose



of this study, we relied on the perspective by Mercer who defines it as “a dynamic, multidimensional psychological construct, which both influences and is affected by a person’s social contexts and interactions and that can vary across individuals and settings but that has a certain degree of internal stability” (2011, p.13). Furthermore, Mercer also suggests that academic self-concept is “an individual’s self-perception of competence and their related self-evaluative judgments in the academic domain” (2011, p.14). Our focus is on the learner’s Foreign Language Learning (FLL) self-concept, which can be defined as “individual’s self-descriptions of competence and evaluative feelings about themselves as a Foreign Language (FL) learner” (Mercer, 2011, p.14).

In order to further clarify the sense in which the term self-concept is perceived, it is important to differentiate it from other self-related constructs, namely self-esteem and self-efficacy. The fundamental distinction of these three constructs lies in the degree of specificity and also the relative importance of cognitive and evaluative self-beliefs involved. For example, self-esteem is related to one’s value system and is considered to have a more evaluative component. In contrast, self-efficacy is more concerned with expectancy beliefs about one’s perceived capability to perform a particular task in a specific context. When compared to self-efficacy, self-concept is less context-dependent and contains both cognitive and affective elements. It concerns an individual’s self-perceptions and self-evaluations in a specific domain. If we consider the level of specificity, self-esteem is the most global of the constructs, while self-efficacy is extremely specific and context-dependent. Even though self-concept is also domain-specific, it is less tightly context specific than self-efficacy (Mercer, 2011). However, when measured in the same domain, they become extremely difficult to separate, so Bong and Skaalvik (2003) state that many researchers acknowledge that self-concept includes a self-efficacy component which could be the most important building block in one’s self-concept. Hence, Mercer’s (2011) conceptualization of self-concept, which we adopted in this study, encompasses beliefs about perceived competence and related self-evaluative beliefs in a specific domain, namely the domain of learning English as a foreign language.

In the attempt to clarify and explain the theoretical nature of the EFL self-concept, Mercer (2011) chose to focus on the data from the case study because of the richness of detail and appropriateness to reveal complex relationships between multiple self-concepts and contextual influences. The data generated for the study were elicited from a 2-year, in-depth, longitudinal case study involving a single, female, German native-speaking participant who

was studying two languages, English as her major and Italian as her minor subject. During the research period, they met for the interviews which were designed to be relatively open-ended in order to enable a more contextualized view of her FL self-concepts. The data were particularly useful at revealing the complex ways in which various self-concepts happen to interrelate and are contextually influenced. After reviewing the data, it was found that various specific domains could be found in the self-concept network. What appeared to be connected most directly to her EFL self-concept are six key domains, namely academic self-concept, general languages self-concept, mother tongue self-concept, foreign languages self-concept, English as a foreign language (EFL) self-concept, and Italian as a foreign language (IFL) self-concept. Each of these domains and its related self-concept were examined, explaining how they appear to connect with other self-concepts and considering the relevance for her self-beliefs as a learner of English as a foreign language.

Relying on the ideas of the explained case study, we opted to conduct research into the self-concept of secondary school learners in order to comprehend their perception of themselves as language learners and to look more closely at their beliefs about foreign language aptitude. However, before we can present the results of this research, it is essential to introduce the notion of language learning aptitude. In the next few paragraphs, early conceptions, current models and future directions of FL aptitude are described and explained in detail.

## **2.4. Foreign language aptitude**

### **2.4.1. Early conceptions of FL aptitude**

There is no doubt that some language learners simply acquire second languages faster and easier than their peers. It could be said that they possess a certain ‘talent’ or ‘knack’ for acquiring languages. Just as researchers were intrigued by the differences between students concerning their general abilities in learning, they were also interested in conceptualizing the specific ability to learn a foreign language. This ability has, therefore, been referred to as language aptitude. However, what exactly does this concept involve? Carroll postulates that “foreign language aptitude is not a unitary factor but rather a complex of basic abilities that are essential to facilitate foreign language learning” (1959 as cited in Dörnyei, 2005, p. 34). Furthermore, he stated that this constellation of abilities is distinct from other cognitive abilities, including intelligence; aptitude is fairly stable in nature; and is itself componential. He contributed greatly with his four factor view of aptitude. The factors are phonemic coding ability (the capacity to retain unfamiliar auditory material through appropriate coding),

inductive language learning ability (the ability to induce rules or generalizations about language from samples of the language), grammatical sensitivity (the ability to identify the functions of words in sentences), and associative learning (the ability to make links between words and phrases in a native and a second language). Moreover, his contribution is also a practical one. With Stanley Sapon, he was the creator of the Modern Languages Aptitude Test (MLAT) (Carroll and Sapon, 1957), a practical system for assessing aptitude. This test battery is composed of five sub-tests, namely Number Learning, Phonetic Script, Spelling Clues, Words in Sentences, and Paired Associates. Other batteries were subsequently developed, for example, Pimsleur's Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB) (Pimsleur, 1966), the Defence Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) (Petersen and Al-Haik, 1976), and VORD (Parry and Child, 1990). More recently developed measurement tools include the CANAL-F test (Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Acquisition of Language- Foreign), an integrated test where the different sub-tests are cumulative in what they assess (Grigorenko *et al.*, 2002); and the LLAMA aptitude test (Meara, 2005) which consists of sub-tests on paired associates learning, on targeting sound-symbol association, on assessing grammatical inferencing, and on probing sound recognition (Skehan, 2012).

#### **2.4.2. Current models of FL aptitude**

Unfortunately, research into the concept of aptitude was neglected in the 1970s “with relatively little empirical work and remarkably little theorising” (Skehan, 2002, p. 69). The reason for this marginalized interest could stem from two criticisms against the concept of language aptitude. Firstly, it was perceived as anti-egalitarian in the sense that a fixed endowment of language learning capacity shapes the level of achievement and consequently diminishes the value of individual effort. Secondly, aptitude was associated with audiolingual methodologies and, as the communicative approach became more influential, the relevance of aptitude was questioned (Skehan, 2002). Nevertheless, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the research into the language aptitude began to improve. The anthology edited by Robinson (2002) can be seen as a milestone in the re-conceptualization of the FL aptitude (Wen *et al.*, 2017). In this section we will summarize some of the innovative perspectives on FL aptitude in this new wave of research and theorising.

##### **2.4.2.1. Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH) model**

In the 1990s, Sparks and Ganschow introduced the LCDH into the FL literature. The basic premise of the LCDH model lies in the argument that native language (L1) literacy skills are essential for predicting L2 learning. For example, if a student experiences difficulties in L1

phonology/orthography, his/her subsequent L2 learning will likely suffer as well. After conducting a series of studies in order to test the efficacy of the LCDH, findings showed that successful FL learners exhibited significantly stronger native language skills than unsuccessful FL learners on measures of phonological/orthographic and syntactic skills, but not on semantic tasks; successful FL learners exhibited significantly stronger FL aptitude on the MLAT; and students with stronger native language skills and higher FL aptitude achieved higher levels of proficiency in the FL after two years of FL study. Therefore, researchers propose to include certain phonological measure of L1 and L2 in FL aptitude tests (Sparks & Ganschow 2001).

#### **2.4.2.2. The successful intelligence perspective and the CANAL-F model**

Inspired by Sternberg's (2002) triadic conception of human intelligence (i.e. his so-called 'successful intelligence' perspective in which intelligence is conceived as comprising three distinct levels: analytical, creative and practical), Grigorenko, Sternberg & Ehrman (2000) proposed a new interpretation of FL aptitude: the Cognitive Ability for Novelty in Language Acquisition-Foreign (CANAL-F) theory. This theory states that one of the central abilities required for FL acquisition is the ability to cope with novelty and ambiguity. In agreement with this conceptualization, the authors also devised a new test for measuring FL aptitude, i.e. the CANAL-F test. The test is administered to the participants in a simulated, naturalistic language learning environment where they are introduced to an artificial language (Ursulu) and then perform small learning tasks. These involve five knowledge acquisition processes: selective encoding, accidental encoding, selective comparison, selective transfer, and selective combination. These cognitive processes are operationalized at the lexical, morphological, semantic and syntactic levels of language and include both visual and oral input and output materials. In order for language learning to take place, the linguistic material must be understood and encoded into working memory and then stored in long-term memory for retrieval; and these aspects are assessed by the immediate and delayed recall tasks. The authors conclude by saying that their work should be considered as a foundation for further development rather than as a completed effort (Grigorenko *et al.*, 2000).

#### **2.4.2.3. Skehan's Conception of FL aptitude and SLA**

In the attempt of theorising and updating aptitude, Skehan (2002) proposed an aptitude model that builds on developments from accumulating SLA research. In this model he stipulated that putative aptitude constructs should be effectively linked to various SLA developmental stages and their associated cognitive processes. For example, it can be argued that the aptitude

components of phonetic coding ability and working memory are most likely to be related to the initial stage of input processing and to noticing, while language analytic ability (grammatical sensitivity and inductive language learning) to the stages of patterning; and retrieval processes to the area of lexicalisation. Skehan (2002) suggests that it can be seen that some existing aptitude components can indeed be related to SLA stages, whereas, in other cases, it is clear that there are no relevant existing aptitude sub-tests. Therefore, it would be useful to produce new aptitude tests and to conduct future research. However, Wen *et al.* (2017) argue that this conception of FL aptitude can have significant implications for theoretical advancement. Instead of only relying on an aptitude score to predict L2 learning outcome, this approach serves to explain the underlying causes for the more superficial IDs in the final learning outcome of an L2. This change represents a milestone in research paradigms of FL aptitude, i.e. from predicting to explaining. Nevertheless, this conception remains at speculative stages because it still lacks a comprehensive account of the nature of the putative aptitude components as well as their functioning within SLA processes and domains.

#### **2.4.2.4. Aptitude Complexes framework**

Another proposal for re-conceptualization of aptitude is Robinson's (2002) 'Aptitude Complexes/Ability Differential' framework. Incorporated in this framework are two closely intertwined hypotheses. The first one, the Aptitude Complexes Hypothesis (based on the ideas of 'aptitude complexes' by Snow 1987, 1994) claims that a set of primary cognitive abilities (e.g. pattern recognition, speed of processing in phonological working memory, grammatical sensitivity) combine to define sets of higher order aptitude complexes hypothesized to support language learning (e.g. noticing the gap, memory for contingent speech, deep semantic processing, memory for contingent text, and metalinguistic rule rehearsal). The second one, the Ability Differentiation Hypothesis claims that L2 learners demonstrate variations within the set of cognitive abilities (with strengths in some of them and weaknesses in others), thus leading to differentiated profiles in corresponding aptitude complexes. The representation of this framework appears like a wheel-shape that is comprised of several layers of circles embedded within each other (Robinson, 2005), where the inner circle consists of basic cognitive abilities, and the next circle is concerned with aptitude complexes, which relate the core abilities to various learning processes. More specifically, there are four aptitude complexes in the framework. They are namely, an aptitude for a focus on form; an aptitude for incidental learning, via oral content; an aptitude for incidental learning via written content; and an aptitude for explicit rule learning. Each of these aptitudes is influenced by different

variables. For example, an aptitude for focus on form is influenced by capacity to notice and by memory for contingent speech, and then each of these can have high or low values, potentially generating four combinations: high noticing and high memory for contingent speech, low noticing but high memory for contingent speech, and so on. The other aptitude complexes similarly are influenced by two ability factors: incidental learning via oral content (memory for contingent speech and deep semantic processing) and via written content (deep semantic processing and memory for contingent text); and explicit rule learning (memory for contingent text and metalinguistic rule rehearsal). Robinson (2002) states that, by assessing IDs in relation to a particular aptitude complex, it could be used to profile and so match learners with an instructional task, as well as to investigate how the structure of abilities interacts with these to inhibit or facilitate SLA processes. What is needed next is a research with potentially important theoretical and practical pedagogic consequences.

#### **2.4.2.5. Working memory and FL aptitude**

The term working memory (WM) has been adopted as the title for a multicomponent model introduced by Baddeley and Hitch in 1974. It involves the “temporary storage and manipulation of information that is assumed to be necessary for a wide range of complex cognitive activities” (Baddeley, 2003, p.189), which, therefore, has important specific implications for language processing. The construct of working memory could be divided into four subsystems: the phonological loop is the specialized verbal component of working memory, concerned with the temporary storage of verbal and acoustic information; the visuospatial sketchpad is the visual equivalent of the phonological loop, responsible for integrating spatial, visual and kinaesthetic information into a unified representation which can be temporarily stored and manipulated; the central executive, responsible for attentional control, thus receiving, coordinating, and integrating information from the subsystems of the visuospatial sketchpad and the phonological loop as well as from long-term memory to carry out complex cognitive tasks such as future planning, decision making, mathematical calculations, and reasoning; and the episodic buffer, a storage counterpart of the central executive (Dörnyei, 2005).

Considering the implications that could be made in SLA, a wide range of studies have looked into different components of WM and their relationship to language learning. Some of the assumptions that were made are that, unlike first language acquisition which depends more on universal grammar (UG), SLA is generally considered to be constrained by general learning mechanisms (WM being one of these), so it is likely that WM plays an equal, if not more

important role in SLA. Furthermore, unlike the process of first language acquisition which is dominated by automatic processing, SLA is characterized by controlled processing, which demands more cognitive resources, therefore relying more on WM. Also, SLA is essentially a process of sequence learning and WM plays an important role in the chunking process of these linguistic sequences and consequently influences vocabulary acquisition and grammar learning. Thus, scholars have proposed to incorporate WM as a central component of the foreign language aptitude construct (Wen & Skehan, 2011).

### **2.4.3. Future directions**

According to Wen *et al.* (2017), in the process of constructing an aptitude theory for tomorrow, various constituents can be grouped into three developmental phases, namely, the testing phase, the theory-construction phase and the pedagogical execution phase. The first phase has been represented by previous aptitude work where the emphasis was on the development of tests and their use in prediction. However, in the second, theory-construction phase, the focus moves from prediction to explanation; and the role of working memory is studied within this framework. More specifically, Skehan (2002) has proposed linking SLA stages to components of aptitude. In a similar vein, Robinson (2007) has suggested a number of aptitude complexes in which different combinations of aptitude components assume particular significance in different learning contexts. What both of these proposals have in common is a central place for working memory, being fundamental to the capacity to learn second languages. The educational execution phase is also connected with WM and two areas of research can be identified. First, Skehan (2012) argues that classroom instruction can be modified in such a way as to suit L2 learners' cognitive working memory profile. Second, intervention measures can be taken to modify L2 learners' working memory capacity. Therefore, the incorporation of working memory into FL aptitude may push the research field into new and entirely desirable directions (i.e. from predicting and explaining to pedagogical execution). For all of the above reasons, Wen *et al.* argue that the "working memory-based perspective on FL aptitude represents an aptitude theory for tomorrow" (2017, Implications for Aptitude Theory Construction and Test Development section, para. 6).

Up until now, previous research about FL aptitude has been focused on re-conceptualizing the concept itself and on trying to measure FL aptitude in learners in order to correlate it with FL proficiency and success. What has largely lacked is more insight into what learners themselves believe about their own FL aptitude and how they perceive themselves as

language learners. Therefore, in this study, we did not attempt to measure learners' FL aptitude, but rather aimed at establishing the nature of their self-beliefs about FL aptitude.

### **3. The study**

#### **3.1. The aim**

The research aimed at analysing secondary school students' self-concepts in the foreign languages context, with the main focus on the belief about FL aptitude. We wished to investigate to what extent students believe that they possess an innate 'talent' for acquiring languages, and how they perceive themselves as language learners. Furthermore, we investigated the relationship between the beliefs of teachers and students about FL aptitude. In other words, we wished to find out if there would be any differences between the way students perceive their FL aptitude and the way their teachers do.

#### **3.2. Sample**

The study was conducted at a grammar school in eastern Croatia in March 2017. The sample consisted of nine secondary school students and three teachers. All the students (3 male and 6 female from two third grade classes) and teachers took part in the study voluntarily. All the students had been learning English as a foreign language since their first grade primary school, except for one student who had started learning it in the fourth grade. The students' teachers participating in this study were their English teacher, their Chemistry teacher and their Sociology teacher. Our initial rationale was to investigate opinions obtained from three different teachers teaching three distinct subject areas: languages, science and social sciences. In the course of our research, after the data had been collected, we decided to exclude the Sociology teacher from the study because her answers were almost totally uninformative. The sample was chosen by the English teacher based on students' grades and her overall perception of them as language learners.

#### **3.3. Procedure and instruments**

The main instruments were two questionnaires: a student and teacher questionnaire designed for this purpose. These were created by the author for the purpose of this study and included elements pertinent to language learner self-concept (questions about childhood, primary school success and secondary school success as well as extra-curricular activities). The students' questionnaire was envisaged to address three fundamental topics. The first section focused on students' early childhood and personal information. The second was concerned



with student's self-concept of primary and secondary school success, while the third concentrated on extra-curricular activities. The questionnaire was written in Croatian and was administered to students to complete at home over a period of one week (see Appendix A). After they had completed the questionnaire, the students were interviewed individually (approximately 20-30 minutes per interview). For the questions asked in the interviews see Appendix B. The teachers' questionnaire included questions about the students' success in the particular subject and their attitude in the classroom. This questionnaire was administered to the teachers of English and Chemistry, which they completed for every student that participated in the study (see Appendix C). This was followed by a short interview with the English language teacher in order to obtain a more detailed insight into their proficiency, language learning and FL aptitude of each of the students.

### **3.4. Results**

We will present our data by focusing on each participant individually and by describing his or her network of self-concepts and beliefs about himself/herself as a language learner. We will first introduce the personal data about the students, which we collected with the questionnaire, and then corroborate it with the information provided by the interviews. Secondly, we will concentrate on various language learners' self-concepts and their beliefs about themselves and the extent of their 'talent' for acquiring languages, in particular, English as a foreign language. More precisely, we will focus on the academic self-concept, the mother tongue self-concept and the foreign languages self-concept, with special attention given to the belief about FL aptitude. Thirdly, we will provide information about their extracurricular activities and interests outside the classroom. In the end, we will present information from the questionnaires completed by the teachers and from the interview held with the teacher of English.

In order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality of the participants of this study, we will be using their pseudonyms. Our high-level-proficiency participants are Josipa, Sara and Darko, intermediate-level-proficiency participants are Helena, Nenad and Vedrana, whilst low-level-proficiency participants are Zoran, Ivona and Anja. We start by describing the profiles of high-level-proficiency students, and then proceed to our three low-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency participants.

### **3.4.1. High-level-proficiency students**

#### **3.4.1.1. Josipa's profile**

Josipa is the only child in her family. Both of her parents are well educated university graduates. Josipa was not a talkative child- she liked talking only to her parents, but was shy when talking to other children. She does not remember which her favourite bed-time story was, but she loved fairy tales, which her parents read to her every night. She watched cartoons as well, and her favourite ones were Pokémon's and Disney cartoons. They used to travel to the seaside, but she has never travelled outside of Croatia so far. Her extracurricular activities in primary school were Way Out language school, where she attended English classes from kindergarten until the end of primary school. Nowadays in high-school, Josipa reads books in Croatian and sometimes in English. Also, she listens to music in English, and she always looks for lyrics and checks the meaning of the words she does not know yet. Josipa also reads news and follows some web pages in English, including some forums where she reads discussions about certain topics, such as books, world news etc., as well as engaging in conversation with other people in forums; she joins their discussions and contributes herself. Moreover, she often watches movies and it is always without the subtitles.

As far as her success in primary school, her grade point average was 4.5, but she does not think that her grades represent the real picture of her success. Her Croatian grade point average was 5, while her English grade point average was also 5 and she finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, her grade point average is 4.1, her Croatian grade point average is 4, while her English and German grade point average is 5, and she finds those grades objective.

To describe her academic self-concept, we compared the data of what she thought about herself as a primary school student and of what she perceives of her now as a high-school student. Back in primary school, Josipa believed to be a successful student. She also thought she was successful in both Croatian and English. Learning was easy for her and she believed she acquired new information with ease. However, she was not intrigued neither by Croatian nor by English language subject content and she didn't participate actively in class. Nowadays, she does not think of herself as successful as she was in primary school, but she still finds herself highly successful in foreign languages. Josipa continues with the act of not participating actively in class and not answering self-initiatively on teachers' questions. Furthermore, she does not contribute with her ideas when working in a team and she is afraid to give her opinion about a topic. In the interview she says: "If I can't concentrate I do not

participate in class. I answer questions self-initiatively if nobody else answers them.” She sees herself as an introverted person, explaining that she prefers working individually because of the lack of patience in a team work to distribute work and because there are always some arguments involved. In the future, she sees herself studying Medicine, and she also loves Maths, Physics and Chemistry.

When it comes to her mother tongue self-concept, it is important for her to know the Croatian language well and she believes it is important for a person to speak his or her own native language correctly.

Regarding foreign languages self-concept, Josipa talks about her experience with English and German. She started learning German in the first grade of primary school. German is more difficult for her than English; she is not as fluent in it as she is in English, but she has never had any struggle with it. She didn’t even study it a lot in primary school and she had an A. The same was with English, it was very easy for her to acquire it and have good grades without having to work hard. When talking about English, Josipa says: “I believe I am highly successful in it. The easiest part for me is the vocabulary, and the hardest part are the tenses, but I need maybe a day to figure it all out. I read the examples in the textbook, and then analyse sentences. I believe the reason for my successfulness is the talent I have for learning languages.” Therefore, Josipa strongly believes that she has an aptitude for acquiring languages and that learning languages comes naturally to her.

#### **3.4.1.2. Sara’s profile**

Sara’s parents both graduated from high-school, but her mother is a CEO so presumably, she comes from financially well situated family. Sara was not very talkative when she was a child; she was a little bit shy around strangers, but it was different with her closest family. Sara attended kindergarten and she liked hanging out with all of the children from her group. Her parents seldom told her bed-time stories because watching cartoons was more enjoyable for Sara. When asked which her favourite ones were, she immediately responded that she loved watching all of the Barbie cartoons. Also, since she has a younger brother, she used to watch other cartoons with him, such as Pokémon’s. All of the cartoons they watched were in Croatian. When it comes to extracurricular activities, she has been attending English classes in a foreign language school ever since going to the kindergarten up until now. As for travelling, her family used to go to the seaside in Croatia every summer when she was little. Also, when she was four years old, she went with her grandma and her brother to Canada to

visit grandma's relatives and she has positive memories of that trip. Currently in high-school, Sara likes reading blogs online and watching YouTube videos. On the other hand, she does not like reading books, neither in Croatian nor in English. Sara thinks it has been an issue for her since childhood, maybe because her parents simply did not read any stories or books to her and she just did not have any opportunity to start liking them. When she watches movies she does not need subtitles, yet she sometimes watches movies with subtitles in English. If she finds herself in a situation where she has an opportunity to speak in English, she feels slightly uncomfortable. For example, when she talks to her relatives in Canada, she just feels strange and nervous in that moment although she knows she is able to talk in English. Sara tries to explain: "I feel confident about my English, but at the same time I sometimes feel insecure". Maybe the reason she sometimes feels under pressure is the fact that her mum and grandma are somewhere close to her and then they listen to her talking so that they could hear how good she is in English. Nevertheless, she would definitely like to visit her relatives again if she gets a chance.

With regard to her success in primary school, her grade point average was 5, and she believes her grades represent the real picture of her success. Her Croatian grade point average was 5, while her English and German grade point average was also 5 and she finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, her grade point average is 4.2, while her Croatian grade point average is 4, but she believes she deserves a higher grade. On the other hand, her English and German grade point average is 5, and she finds both of those grades objective.

Sara's academic self-concept also consists of the beliefs she has about herself as a primary school student and as a high-school student. She believes she was highly successful in primary school; and was successful both in Croatian and in English. She was curious about and intrigued by the Croatian and English language subject content and she participated actively in class. Currently in high-school, she does not believe to be as successful as she was in primary school, but she still finds herself highly successful in foreign languages. She actively participates in the English language classes, always contributing with her ideas in a team group and is not afraid to share her opinion about a topic. She sometimes wants to know more about a certain topic and thinks she easily acquires new information. She finds herself to be an introvert person and explains it by saying: "Even though I have no problem talking to other people, I just do not like being in the centre of attention". When talking about other school subjects, Sara admits that she pays attention in class if the subject matter is interesting for her. For example, in Geography and History class she does not participate at all, she

entirely shuts herself out of it and focuses on something completely different. On the other hand, she likes English and German. She continues by saying that she also likes humanistic subjects, such as Psychology and Sociology, but she does not have any passion for Science subjects. After finishing high-school, Sara thinks she will study Social work because she loves helping people. She is also considering studying Psychology or Speech-language pathology, so she is still not sure which of these areas she will pursue a career in.

With respect to mother tongue self-concept, Sara believes it is extremely important for her to use the Croatian language correctly. She is surprised when she sees her friends getting low grades in grammar tests because “it is their native language, they should know it better”. For Sara, the Croatian language in primary school was truly an interesting topic. She loved grammar exercises and she found them more fascinating if they were more challenging. She asserts: “I genuinely enjoyed practicing those parts of language”.

Regarding Sara’s foreign languages self-concept, we describe how she feels about her English and German language self-concept. Sara straightforwardly states: “I consider myself to be extremely successful in English language”. What justifies this opinion is the fact that she has only one more certificate to obtain in Cambridge English exams. Sara has already obtained certificates in Cambridge English exams (FCE and CAE), and in two months she will take Cambridge English Proficiency Exam (CPE). This is the ultimate level she can obtain right now, so she thinks: “I can say about myself that I am excellent in English language”. When asked what she believes to be the reason of her success, Sara strongly asserts: “I believe that I possess a talent for acquiring languages. When I think about it, all of my friends watch TV as much as I do, they also listen to the music as much as I do; I even have friends that have studied English since kindergarten as I have, but I am considerably better and more successful in English”. Furthermore, with regard to German language self-concept, Sara acknowledges: “I was a little bit shocked when I first got in touch with German because I had been learning English since I knew about myself and it seemed strange and I didn’t like it as much as I liked English.” Partly the reason for this was that in the first year they had a teacher who didn’t put much effort in her classes, but then in the fifth grade came a different teacher who pushed them to work harder and better. Therefore, Sara asserts: “I have always known that these languages would be essential for me and I loved learning them. Moreover, I was always excellent at acquiring them. Previously I didn’t enjoy learning German, but now in high-school I find it more interesting. I simply love grammar and I just want to know how everything functions and how to say everything I want to say”. Thus, for Sara, learning

foreign languages is of the utmost importance and she enjoys getting better at it by obtaining new knowledge and actively developing language skills.

#### **3.4.1.3. Darko's profile**

Darko's parents are both highly educated university graduates. In his childhood, Darko was not really talkative; he mostly just listened to stories. "Bambi" and "Jack and Mary" were his favourite ones, which his parents always read to him. They used to live with his grandparents, so Darko talked a lot with his grandpa. Since they lived in countryside, his grandpa always talked about his work and obligations, while Darko attentively listened to his stories. He did not go to kindergarten, but he used to hang around with children from his neighbourhood. Darko watched cartoons when he was little, they had a lot of video cassettes, and his favourite one was "The fantastic four" which was in English. When it comes to music, he mostly listened to Croatian music, but he started listening to foreign music when he started going to primary school. Darko mostly travelled in Croatia when he participated in various competitions. He also travelled to Italy with his sports club where they stayed for three days. He liked the sound of Italian, it sounded sophisticated and melodic to him, but he never studied it. His parents always opted for English, and since his mum is a German teacher, she wanted him to study it, but he does not really like it. When they moved to Vinkovci, he played football for a short time and then he started playing judo which he continues playing. Apart from that, he started attending "Linguapax language school" when he was eight years old and he is still attending it. As for other activities related to English, Darko reads books and communicates a lot in classes in "Linguapax". Sometimes he also talks to his sister in English. He also listens to music in English and watches YouTube videos.

With reference to Darko's success in primary school, his grade point average was 5, and he believes his grades represent the real picture of his success. His Croatian grade point average was 5, while his English grade point average was also 5 and he finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, his grade point average is 4.7, while his Croatian, English and German grade point average is 5, and he also finds those grades objective.

Regarding Darko's academic self-concept, he believes to be a successful student in primary school, being successful in both Croatian and English. However, he was not as interested in the Croatian subject matter as he was in the English one. Darko participated actively in class, easily remembered new information and quickly acquired new subject content. Nowadays in high-school, he still believes to be a successful student, again being successful in both

Croatian and English. He likes working in a team when everybody contributes equally, but that happens rarely. Students from his class do not really make effort when working in a team and mostly everything is up to him to deliver in front of the class. Therefore, he says: “And if I have to read it, I won’t read anything stupid, so I make effort to do it rightly and end up doing it by myself”. As far as participating in class, it depends on the subject. For example, he participates more actively in Biology than in Arts because he is more interested in the Science subjects. When asked about his future plans, Darko says that he is interested in electrical engineering as well as in medicine because he enjoys studying Biology and because his dad is a doctor. So, Darko is still not sure what to do, what path to choose, either engineering or medicine.

When it comes to Darko’s mother tongue self-concept, he asserts that: “Learning the Croatian language was important to me because I like to use the language correctly”. Darko was not so interested in learning it, but it was crucial for him to know how to speak his language correctly. He continues by saying: “I didn’t want to neglect my own language. My parents always tell me that it’s important to know your own language because it’s the part of your basic culture”.

In continuation, Darko’s foreign languages self-concept will be described. Darko started learning English in the first grade of primary school and German in high school. He mostly watched cartoons in English and then it was interesting for him to learn it because “it was great for me to understand some words when I watched the cartoons. I was interested in the language and I was motivated to learn it”. He continues by saying: “We also learned the language through games, and since I am a competitive person, I always liked winning those games so that was also my motivation for learning the language”. As a complete opposite, Darko does not know German so well, so when he hears something and he does not understand it, he is aware of how little he knows and that he actually does not want to know more. He concludes that: “I am interested in it, but I do not like it as much as I like English”. When we asked him about his success in English, Darko claimed: “I would say that I am pretty successful in English judging by my diplomas, but that is because I have been studying it for a long time. It is interesting for me because of the level I am at now, and it motivates me to progress even more”. Furthermore, he asserts: “I believe that I have a talent for learning languages, maybe because of my mum since she is also great in German. English was always easy for me, ever since I started learning it I have never had to struggle with it”. Therefore, in

Darko's case, it could be said that his success in learning languages originates from a coalescence of talent and diligence.

#### **3.4.1.4. Discussion**

After looking into profiles of high-level-proficiency students, it can be deduced that all of them come from financially well situated families whose parents care about not only their mandatory education, but also about their extra-curricular activities because all of them attended and two of them still attend foreign language school. It cannot be argued that this particular fact is the reason that these students are among the high-level-proficiency ones, but it is a fact that these parents consider education as an extremely important factor in their children's lives. Furthermore, one of the characteristics that all of them have in common is the fact that they invest their free time in engaging in activities where they utilize the knowledge of speaking English, for example, Josipa contributes to conversations on forums, Sara talks to her relatives in Canada, while Darko participates in conversations in foreign language school. Moreover, all of them instantly remembered which stories or cartoons were their favourite ones back in childhood, and all of them watch movies without the need for subtitles.

When it comes to their academic self-concept, these students believe to be successful in both primary and secondary school. On the one hand, Josipa and Sara do not believe to be as successful as they were in primary school, but they still find themselves highly successful in foreign languages, while, on the other hand, Darko believes to be equally successful in both primary and secondary school. Although they are interested in different areas for further development in their future lives, all of them have in common the fact that they consider themselves successful in learning foreign languages.

As far as their mother tongue self-concept is concerned, it is important for all of them to use the Croatian language correctly. Even though various factors influence this perception (for Sara it is the genuine interest in her mother tongue, maybe because she is generally interested in all of the languages she studies, while for Darko it is the opinion of his parents which he truly respects), all of them perceive the knowledge of their mother tongue to be highly important in their education and in life.

With reference to their foreign languages self-concept, it was analysed how they perceive themselves as language learners of English and German. Again, they perceive themselves to be highly successful in acquiring foreign languages. What they consider to be the reason for



this success, among other factors, is the talent for acquiring languages because all of them believe to possess it.

Therefore, it can be stated that the environmental circumstances, along with their motivation and hard work, contribute greatly to the positive language learner self-concept of these students and their beliefs about themselves as successful language learners.

### **3.4.2. Low-level-proficiency students**

#### **3.4.2.1. Zoran's profile**

Zoran's father graduated from high-school, while his mother graduated from college. In his childhood, Zoran used to love watching Ninja Turtles, Tom & Jerry and he watched cartoons only in Croatian. As far as bed-time stories, he always listened to them, and his favourites were Little Red Riding Hood and The Wolf and the Seven Kids. When it comes to listening to music, Zoran mostly listened to music in Croatian when he was a child, and later on, at the end of primary school, he started listening to music in English. He used to travel when he was a child to the seaside and to Italy and Hungary. He spent a week in Italy and it was strange for him to hear another language. In his free time, he practices football.

With reference to Zoran's success in primary school, his grade point average was 5, and he believes his grades represent the real picture of his success. His Croatian grade point average was 5, while his English and German grade point average was 4 and he finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, his grade point average is 3.7, his Croatian and German grade point average is 4, while his English grade point average is 3 and he finds all of those grades objective.

Regarding Zoran's academic self-concept, he perceives himself to be a successful student in primary school, but not as successful nowadays in high-school. Zoran states: "Primary school was not so hard for me, I only encountered some difficulties in the last two years, but otherwise it was easy for me". Zoran claims that he participated actively in class in primary school, and that he continues doing that in high-school as well. He prefers working in a team than working individually and he always contributes while working in a team. In the future, Zoran sees himself in doing sports or in humanistic group of subjects, like psychology, sociology, or philosophy.

Regarding Zoran's mother tongue self-concept, he thinks he was proficient in Croatian in primary school, but he was not that interested in the subject matter. Zoran affirms: "As far as

primary school and the Croatian language, it was worth learning it for my general knowledge and I just kept on building it through everyday communication”.

We now proceed to Zoran’s foreign languages self-concept. He started learning English in the kindergarten and he thinks he was rather successful in primary school. His first impression of English was that it was very interesting. As so far as German, Zoran never liked it as much as English. He finds it rather difficult to learn new words and he had a very strict and demanding teacher. Now the situation is different in high school, the difficulty of English increased and it is more demanding than German, which they started learning now from the beginning so it is definitely easier than English. As far as English language, Zoran believes he was more successful before, now he has stopped making progress. He believes the reason for that is the amount of school work for other subjects and not having enough time to focus more on English. Zoran explains: “I think I was successful before in primary school because I worked harder. I wouldn’t tell that I have a talent for languages, my success is entirely based on the hard work I put into it”. Other than watching movies and listening to music, he does not work on his English any more than it is necessary for his school work.

#### **3.4.2.2. Ivona’s profile**

Ivona’s parents both graduated from high-school. Ivona was very talkative as a child, she used to talk to neighbours, her parents, sisters, friends. Her parents used to read bed-time stories, her favourite one was Cinderella. She watched cartoons both in Croatian and in other languages, but she does not remember which one was her favourite. Ivona also listened to music, and it was mostly Croatian music. She did not travel a lot in her childhood, later she travelled to places in Croatia and she went to Hungary for two days with her class. As far as extra-curricular activities, Ivona has been practicing athletics since she was eight years old. She also volunteered in Red Cross and sang in a choir.

With reference to her success in primary school, her grade point average was 4.8, and she believes her grades represent the real picture of her success. Her Croatian grade point average was 5, while her English and German grade point average was 4 and she finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, her grade point average is 3.9; her Croatian grade point average is 4, but she thinks she deserves a higher grade. Her English grade point average is 3, and her German grade point average is 5; and she finds both of those grades objective.

As part of her academic self-concept, Ivona has a set of beliefs about her successfulness as a student. She considers herself a successful student in both primary and high-school, being

proficient in both Croatian and English. On the other hand, she no longer perceives herself to be proficient in foreign languages nowadays in high-school. In primary school, Ivona participated actively in class; she easily remembered new information and quickly acquired new subject matter. Currently in high-school, she still participates actively in class and answers teachers' questions self-initiatively. Ivona explains: "I participate actively in class, but it depends on the subject sometimes. I will answer questions in class if I think that I know the answer to that question". She prefers working in a team, and she contributes equally with ideas and solutions when working on a project. Ivona is considering of becoming a social worker because she would like to help other people.

Regarding Ivona's mother tongue self-concept, she shares her beliefs about Croatian: "It is crucial to know your own native language in order to communicate effectively with other people". Furthermore, she adds that she was interested in learning the Croatian language in primary school because it was important for her, while talking to other people, that they do not tease her about not knowing certain things. Nowadays, in high school, she also works on improving her language skills.

Regarding Ivona's foreign languages self-concept, she gave us her opinion about both English and German language. Ivona states: "My first impression of those languages was that they were interesting. I was better in German at first, and I was a little bit scared of my English teacher. I think it influenced the progress of my English language learning because we didn't work on the grammar enough so now I have problems with grammar". Moreover, Ivona claims: "I would say that I am neither successful nor unsuccessful in English. The hardest part for me is the grammar, while vocabulary and comprehension are the easiest for me. I believe I have some sort of talent, because it is easy for me to remember words. Maybe it is because I listen to music so often". Ivona explains her situation by saying that in primary school, the English teacher was incompetent and ineffective and Ivona believes it has left some consequences because she could not compensate the lack of knowledge and it is hard for her now to acquire grammar. Other than work for school, when it comes to English, Ivona sometimes watches TV series and movies without subtitles, but she does not read books in English, only in Croatian. Moreover, she speaks English only in school. Nevertheless, Ivona thinks English will be very useful for her later in life because it is becoming more global as a language. She thinks she still has to work to obtain the language level necessary for her to be successful in English.

### **3.4.2.3. Anja's profile**

Anja's parents both graduated from high-school. Anja was very quiet when she was little; she did not talk a lot, especially with people who were strangers to her. Her mum used to tell her bed-time stories all the time and Peter Pan was one of her favourite ones. Anja used to watch cartoons, but she does not recall them and does not remember which ones were her favourite. From what her mum told her, there were mostly in Croatian. As far as extracurricular activities, Anja plays handball. She has always been into sports, but she started playing handball in the seventh grade of primary school and continues playing it. In her free time, Anja reads books, but only in Croatian. Moreover, she likes listening to music, and she listens to music in English. She also likes watching movies, and when she does watch them she always watches them with subtitles in Croatian.

With reference to her success in primary school, her grade point average was 5. Her Croatian and English grade point average was 5; however, she believes those grades should be lower. Currently in high-school, her grade point average is 3.8; her Croatian and German grade point average is 4, and her English grade point average is 3; and she finds all of those grades objective.

When it comes to Anja's academic self-concept, she considers herself a successful student in both primary and high-school, being proficient in both Croatian and English. On the other hand, she no longer considers herself to be proficient in foreign languages nowadays in high-school. In primary school, Anja participated actively in class; she easily remembered new information and quickly acquired new subject matter. Currently in high-school, she participates less actively in class and does not answer teachers' questions self-initiatively. Anja affirms: "Ever since I started going to high-school, I find myself not participating actively in class. I rarely answer any questions in class, only if I'm being called on. Even if I know the answer to some questions, I will not raise my hand and answer them because I know that somebody else will". At this moment, Anja is not sure what it is that she would like to do later in life. She is successful in sports, and it is one of the things she is interested in, but when it comes to plans about what comes after high-school, Anja is still not sure about them. She finds herself more interested in the humanistic subjects.

Regarding Anja's mother-tongue self-concept, she shares her thoughts about the language. She claims: "I did not make enough effort to study it in primary school because the teacher did not teach us adequately". Therefore, she regrets that she did not get a chance to learn

more. Anja can see the consequences now in high-school because she could have had better knowledge in grammar, but unfortunately that is not the case. Furthermore, Anja argues: “I try to compensate the lack of knowledge from the primary school, but I find it really hard because I see that most of my peers are so much ahead of me and already possess knowledge that I should have too, but I do not”. Anja is aware of the fact that there is simply a huge difference between them in terms of knowledge attainment.

As far as Anja’s foreign languages self-concept is concerned, she informs about her beliefs about German and English language. Anja states: “When it comes to German, I am not so successful”. She explains by saying that she was supposed to start learning it in the fourth grade, but only started in the fifth, so she had a lot of catching up to do. It was especially hard for her when she enrolled to high-school. The teacher does not provide them with enough language content, so she is not satisfied with her knowledge. For example, she studies only for the exam, passes it, but is not able to use this knowledge appropriately. Anja then describes her opinion of English: “My first impression when I started learning English was that it was fascinating. Anytime when I would learn new words I would come home from school and tell them to my mum”. Furthermore, Anja asserts: “I think I am successful, but to a certain extent. I do not think that I possess a talent for learning languages. I believe the reason for my success is hard work and paying attention in class”. Anja does not dedicate more time to learning English outside of class and uses English only in class. Notwithstanding, she finds English to be essential, and believes it will be of great value for her. Anja thinks she could communicate with somebody in English, but there is a lot of room for improvement.

#### **3.4.2.4. Discussion**

The obtained information from the profiles of low-level-proficiency students tells us that five of the six low-level-proficiency students’ parents graduated from high-school. The environmental circumstances of low-level-proficiency students did not differ substantially from the circumstances of high-level-proficiency students when it comes to watching cartoons or listening to bed-time stories in their childhood, but one characteristic that emerges is the fact that not all of them remembered which cartoons were their favourite ones. Moreover, all of them watched cartoons and listened to music in their childhood mostly in the Croatian language.

If their academic self-concept is to be examined, it could be stated that all of them perceived themselves to be successful students in primary school. Currently in high-school, Ivona and

Anja still consider themselves successful, while Zoran does not think he is as successful as he was in primary school. One characteristic they all have in common is the fact that they no longer perceive themselves to be proficient in foreign languages nowadays in high-school.

As far as their mother tongue self-concept, all of the students report that they are interested in the effectiveness of everyday communication. Thus, they are mostly focused on the pragmatic part of the language. What is more, Anja even struggles with compensating the lack of native language attainment.

After the examination of their foreign languages self-concept, where students informed about their beliefs about English and German language, it can be concluded that all of them perceive themselves to be neither successful nor unsuccessful in learning foreign languages. The conclusion that arises is that low-level-proficiency students struggle more with foreign language acquisition and find foreign language learning more demanding and challenging. Some of them see the reason of this unsuccessfulness in the amount of school work or the incompetence of the previous language teachers. Furthermore, Zoran and Anja believe they do not possess talent for acquiring languages, while Ivona thinks she has some sort of talent. Moreover, neither one of them engages in activities that require the use of English language outside of regular classes, so their language use is restricted only to time spent in school.

Thus, it could be argued that, while having in mind the data of their environmental circumstances plus the academic, mother tongue and foreign language self-concept, low-level-proficiency students have less positive language learner self-concept than high-level-proficiency students do.

### **3.4.3. Intermediate-level-proficiency students**

#### **3.4.3.1. Helena's profile**

Helena's parents both graduated from high-school. Helena was generally a very talkative child. She has an older brother and a younger sister with whom she always liked to talk a lot. Helena was also interested in the grown-up conversations when some relatives or other people came to their house; she sat and listened to them carefully. She used to listen to bed-time stories all the time, and one of her favourites was Cinderella. When it comes to cartoons, she loved watching Tom & Jerry because they were interesting and funny. She watched some of the cartoons on TV in Croatian and some in their original form on cassettes. Helena also listened to music a lot; she mostly listened to foreign music since childhood and it was mostly in English. As for travelling, they used to travel every summer to the seaside. The only time

she travelled abroad was with her class last year to Budapest for two days. When she was in primary school Helena used to have private piano lessons, which she liked a lot, but now in secondary school she does not have so much time. Outside of school obligations, Helena sometimes reads news or some articles on the Internet in English. As for music, she mostly listens to songs in English and she always finds the lyrics on the Internet. When it comes to watching movies, she watches them often but she always puts the subtitles on.

With regard to her success in primary school, her grade point average was 4.8, and she believes her grades represent the real picture of her success. Her Croatian, English and German grade point average was 5, and she finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, her grade point average is 3.7, but she believes she deserves higher grades considering the effort she puts into studying. Her Croatian grade point average is 4, and her German grade point average is 5 and she finds those grades objective. On the other hand, her English grade point average is 4, but she believes she deserves a higher grade.

As far as her general academic self-concept, she believes to be a successful student in primary school, being successful both in Croatian and English. She was interested in both Croatian and English subject matter, and actively participated in classes. Currently in high-school, she considers herself not to be as successful as she was in primary school, but she believes herself to be proficient in Croatian and in foreign languages. While talking to her in the interview, she said: "I find myself to be a successful student because I easily remember new information, and when it comes to learning vocabulary, I successfully acquire new words in English and German". Furthermore, she finds working individually acceptable, but she prefers working in a team and she contributes equally in projects. She mostly actively participates in class, and if she knows the answer she will raise her hand and answer the question. When thinking about future, Helena wishes to become a teacher in primary school, or a teacher of Croatian, or even a speech therapist, because she is very interested in working with children and helping people.

When it comes to mother tongue self-concept, Helena claims: "I always loved the Croatian language; it was always very interesting for me and I even wanted to be a teacher of Croatian. Nowadays in high school the situation has changed a little, it is not my priority anymore". However, since she has a good background from the primary school, now she is just building her knowledge. It is very important for her to know her language better than just for the everyday communication. She always corrects people if they make mistakes, so using language correctly is of the utmost importance for her.

Regarding Helena's foreign languages self-concept, she presented information about English and German self-concept. Helena asserts: "Since the beginning, I find foreign languages interesting and I have always enjoyed learning them". She started learning German in the first grade of primary school and then English in the fourth grade. Now in secondary school, Helena chose English to be her primary language because she finds it to be more natural for her and she likes it more than German. She is also very interested in learning Spanish because she finds it different and fun. When asked about her successfulness in English, Helena answers: "I believe that I am successful in English language and I find vocabulary to be the easiest part and grammar the hardest in English. I acquire new information very quickly and I find myself to be more successful in languages than in some other school subjects, but I do not know if it is the talent or something else". Therefore, it could be argued that all of the languages Helena studies have an important significance in her education and in her life.

#### **3.4.3.2. Nenad's profile**

Nenad's parents both graduated from high-school. His grandpa and grandma used to tell him bed-time stories but he does not remember precisely which ones nor does he remember his favourite one. Nenad used to watch cartoons as well; The Smurfs were his favourite ones. He watched them in Croatian, but some of them were in German as well. It was interesting to hear it because it was different than Croatian. He started learning English in primary school and his first impression was that it was also very interesting and fun because they learned it through games.

Nenad's success in primary school shows that his grade point average was 4.7, and he believes his grades represent the real picture of his success. His Croatian and English grade point average was 4, and he finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, his grade point average is 3.8, while his Croatian and German grade point average is 3. His English grade point average is 4, and he finds all of those grades objective.

With reference to Nenad's academic self-concept, he considers himself a successful student in primary school, being proficient in both Croatian and English. However, he was not so interested in either the Croatian subject matter or the English one. Likewise, he did not participate very actively in class nor did he answer teachers' questions self-initiatively. Nevertheless, he thinks he remembered new information easily and quickly acquired new subject matter. Currently in high-school, Nenad does not seem to perceive himself as successful as he was in primary school. He continues with not participating actively in class



or answering teacher's questions self-initiatively. Nenad claims he likes both working individually and in a team. He pays attention in class, but he does not participate a lot. If somebody asks him a question he will answer and maybe sometimes he will answer self-initiatively if he knows that the answer is the correct one. Nenad is interested in the humanistic group of subjects, such as history and also in the English language.

Regarding his mother tongue self-concept, Nenad argues that he was not really interested in the Croatian language in primary school. He explains: "I do not like grammar, and I believe that the level of knowledge which is necessary for everyday communication is enough for me".

As far as Nenad's foreign languages self-concept, he believes: "When comparing English and German, I would say that I am better in English. German is more difficult when it comes to learning vocabulary and grammar". Furthermore, he asserts: "I believe that I am 80% successful in English. The reason for this success is that I worked hard in primary school, I read books and watched movies". Nenad says he used to read more before, but generally he likes reading books. He reads more in Croatian, but he also read books in English as well. When asked about the reason for his success, Nenad states: "I do not think that having talent is the reason for my success, it is more hard work and reading books". Besides reading books, Nenad also watches movies (sometimes without the subtitles) and listens to music. He finds lyrics only for songs he is interested in. Nenad mostly uses English now in school. He believes: "English will be useful in the future if I will be working with some foreigners". Nenad concludes that languages will be beneficial for finding a job in the future.

#### **3.4.3.3. Vedrana's profile**

Vedrana's parents both graduated from high-school. In her childhood, she did not talk a lot in the beginning, but then when she did start to talk, she was unstoppable, and she always talked. She talked to everyone about everything. Her dad used to tell her stories and her favourite one was Cinderella. Vedrana used to watch cartoons as well, her favourite being the Teletubbies and Pokémon, which were in Croatian. She did not really use to listen to music, only later on in primary school, but from the very first she listened to it in English, never in Croatian. As far as travelling abroad, they visited her uncle in Germany, and when it comes to German, the first impression was that it was strange for her. Since the very beginning she did not like German language and it remained like that. Vedrana started learning German in the fourth grade and English in the first grade. She liked English better: "I found it easier than German.

Maybe the reason for that is because I listen to English music, watch English movies and series, I just have more contact with English language”. When it comes to outside school activities, she used to play taekwondo, volleyball and handball, although now she plays only taekwondo. Alongside that, Vedrana listens to English music every day, and always searches for lyrics of almost all of the songs she listens to. Also, she watches movies and TV series every day before going to sleep and reads a lot of books, tending to read one book per month, either in Croatian or English. In primary school, Vedrana attended extra classes in English, so the teacher used to give them some books to read, which was really interesting and challenging for her.

With regard to her success in primary school, her grade point average was 4.9, and she believes her grades represent the real picture of her success. Her Croatian, English and German grade point average was 5, and she finds those grades objective. Currently in high-school, her grade point average is 3.6, but she believes she deserves higher grades in some of the subjects. Her Croatian grade point average is 3, while her English and German grade point average is 4; and she finds all of those grades objective.

As far as Vedrana’s academic self-concept is concerned, she believes to be a successful student in primary school, being proficient in both Croatian and English. Although she was not so interested in the Croatian and English subject matter, she thinks she easily remembered new information and quickly acquired new subject matter. Nowadays in high-school, she does not think of herself as successful as she was in primary school, yet considers herself proficient in both Croatian and English. As far as team work, she is sometimes afraid to share her opinion because she does not like to insist on it, thus she thinks that she works better when she is by herself. Vedrana does not really participate actively in class and does not raise her hand to answer questions. As far as the school subjects Vedrana is most interested in, she would opt for biology. In the future, she sees herself in studying medical laboratory diagnostics. Thus, Vedrana would say that she is more prone to science subjects.

Regarding Vedrana’s mother-tongue self-concept, she was not really interested in the language and its grammar and orthography in primary school. Vedrana says: “I was more prone to literature. I think the same now in high-school; I find that literature is the most interesting part of the Croatian language”. On the other hand, Vedrana thinks: “I believe I should definitely improve the knowledge of my mother tongue because I do not think that everyday communication level is good enough for me”. She thinks that it is a given that we

should have a certain level of proficiency in our mother tongue and she believes she should work harder on improving it.

When it comes to Vedrana's foreign languages self-concept, she compares English and German. English was fun for her to study and it was never hard for her to acquire new things. Vedrana affirms: "I have never really spent any time studying it; I just always get good marks without making much effort". As far as German language, she has some issues. She did not have them back in primary school, but now in high-school, she just has to work harder. Vedrana has strong beliefs about her language successfulness. She asserts: "I would say that I am highly successful in English. I believe that everything comes easily for me in English and I think that I have a talent for learning languages. I compare myself to other students in my class and I see them struggling to learn it, while it is super easy for me and I never struggle in order to acquire something new". Furthermore, Vedrana admits that she only learns English during classes and does not spend extra time studying it more. Nevertheless, learning English is of great significance for her because she intends on moving somewhere where English is the spoken language. Vedrana believes she already possesses the needed level in English to be able to communicate effectively with other people, but there is always room for improvement.

#### **3.4.3.4. Discussion**

When it comes to profiles of intermediate-level-proficiency students, what they have in common is the fact that all of their parents graduated from high-school. All of them listened to bed-time stories and watched cartoons in their childhood, but Nenad is the one who does not remember his favourite ones. Furthermore, both Helena and Vedrana were really talkative in their childhood, while Nenad was always shy and reserved. Neither one of them attended foreign language school, but they are relatively invested in using English language in their free time through listening to music, watching movies and reading books.

As far as their academic self-concept is concerned, all of them consider themselves to be successful students in primary school, but not as successful nowadays in high-school. Even though all of them have different tendencies for their future plans, they believe to be proficient in both Croatian and English language.

Regarding their mother tongue self-concept, they differ substantially in their beliefs about the importance of native language attainment. On the one hand, Helena and Vedrana believe it is very important for them to know their native language better than just for the everyday

communication, while on the other hand, Nenad believes that the everyday communication level of knowledge is enough for him.

With reference to their foreign languages self-concept, all of them believe to be successful in learning foreign languages, but they perceive themselves to be more successful in English than in German. What they consider to be the reason for their success also differs considerably. For instance, Nenad believes he does not have a talent for acquiring languages, but that his success originates from his hard work. On the contrary, Vedrana strongly asserts that she possesses certain talent because she has always acquired it with ease. Therefore, considering the environmental circumstances as well as their academic, mother tongue and foreign languages self-concepts, it could be stated that all of these students have a positive language learner self-concept and that they consider themselves to be successful language learners with high regard for the language itself.

#### **3.4.4. Teachers' beliefs**

First, the beliefs of the English teacher about high-level-, low-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency students are presented. The teacher gives her opinion about each of the students by focusing on their characteristics, abilities and skills. Later on, the beliefs of the Chemistry teacher concerning the students' success in Chemistry and their success in general are introduced.

##### **3.4.4.1. Teachers' beliefs about high-level-proficiency learners**

The English teacher thinks that Josipa is highly talented and profoundly successful in English. She argues that her knowledge and her language skills are greater than those of her classmates. She explains it by saying that Josipa is successful in both written and oral expression and that her written assignments always enthuse the teacher with the richness of her vocabulary and structure. What differentiate Josipa from the rest of her class is her alienation and extreme shyness. She prefers working independently and not within a team, being that she is highly an introverted person.

When it comes to teacher's beliefs about Sara, the English teacher says that Sara is highly successful in English and actively participates in class. Sara is interested in the subject matter, self-initiatively answers questions and always wants to know more. Moreover, Sara is extremely talented in English language, she possesses far greater knowledge than her classmates (when nobody knows, she definitely knows) and regularly attends English language

competitions. Sara is aware of her knowledge, but at the same time is humble and modest. She easily acquires new subject matter and shows language accuracy and fluency.

Regarding beliefs about Darko, the English teacher claims that Darko is truly successful in English. He is talented, but also very hard-working. Thus, his outstanding results are a combination of hard work and talent. He often surprises with his wit and intelligent questions and comments, often thinking about the metalinguistic function of the language. He is communicative and eloquent. If he makes a mistake, it bothers him deeply and he has to understand why he made that mistake. He always participates actively in class and always wants to know more.

The Chemistry teacher says that Josipa is a student with above-average intelligence. She is sharp-witted and logically connects all of the class contents. Also, she is hard-working and diligent, always wants to know more and easily remembers new information. On the other hand, she hardly communicates with the rest of her class mates and professors. She says that she is afraid of talking to people, that she has had social phobia since childhood. Despite this, she is accepted in the class, although her class mates are sometimes confused by not knowing how to approach her. Moreover, she loves to draw and is good at it; she often spends an entire class drawing, but always pays attention to the subject matter.

The Chemistry teacher claims that Sara is moderately successful in Chemistry. She sometimes participates actively in class and is interested in the subject matter. Sara is talkative, communicative, and always ready for action. She can learn fast, but lacks working habits. She is better in the humanistic subjects than in the science ones. Even her Chemistry teacher acknowledges that Sara shows great interest in Croatian and foreign languages.

The Chemistry teacher affirms that Darko is successful in Chemistry. He participates actively in class and is interested in the subject area. He always wants to know more and easily remembers new information. He is very hard-working, cooperative, communicative and the favourite in the class. He has no problem with studying and he easily makes relations between various contents in this subject.

#### **3.4.4.2. Teachers' beliefs about low-level-proficiency learners**

The English teacher thinks that Zoran is not very successful in this subject and not interested in it. He does not want to know more and does not have the talent for it. He also has little pre-existing knowledge of the language, but he has not worked on recovering that insufficiency.

English language is not a priority for him and he only studies it before an exam, which, of course, is not enough or is rarely enough for a positive grade.

The English teacher states that Ivona is hard-working, but doubts her knowledge- she feels that she has less background knowledge than the rest of her class mates and that English language is her “weak spot”. She often gets an F in written tests, but corrects it relatively fast. She is better in oral exams, although she sometimes makes pronunciation mistakes.

The English teacher states that Anja is reserved, shy and does not possess talent for languages. She needs constant encouragement to participate in class. She has less background knowledge than the rest of her class mates, so she lacks confidence - even if she knows something, she hesitates to say it. She is not so interested in English language, but the teacher thinks that it can be applied to all subjects.

The Chemistry teacher claims that Zoran is not really successful in Chemistry and does not have the talent in this area. He is lazy and irregular in studying. He is intelligent and often tries to solve the problem using his charm. He is not so interested in the science subjects and the teacher thinks that the problem is in the lack of pre-existing knowledge from the primary school.

The Chemistry teacher thinks that Ivona is moderately successful and participates in class. She is not so interested in the class matter and lacks incentive to learn more. The teacher believes that Ivona finds joy in small things, but school and studying do not mean a lot to her.

The Chemistry teacher claims that Anja is moderately successful in Chemistry, does not participate actively in class nor answers questions self-initiatively. She is not so interested in the subject matter and lacks incentive to learn more.

#### **3.4.4.3. Teachers’ beliefs about intermediate-level-proficiency students**

The English teacher believes that Helena is very communicative, interested in the subject matter, and actively participates in class. She is very competent when it comes to oral activities, vocabulary and listening, but on the other hand, she lacks proficiency in language form. She could obtain higher grades in English, but having to study other subjects leaves her with no time to focus more on the English language.

The English language teacher believes that Nenad is moderately successful. The teacher thinks he possesses talent for languages to a certain extent. He is observant in class and pays

attentions, but he will never ask a question or answer any of the questions if he is not called on. He fluently narrates the texts and answers questions; he always successfully passes vocabulary and reading comprehension exams, but struggles with grammar.

The English language teacher affirms that Vedrana is moderately successful and rarely participates actively in class. She definitely has a talent for learning languages, but she often relies mostly on her talent and the existing knowledge, not working hard enough on upgrading it. She lacks the working habits and the eagerness to learn more. She has a potential, but she has not made an effort to seize it through. With just a little bit of effort, she could obtain excellent results.

The Chemistry teacher thinks that Helena does not show great interest in the science subjects. She learns the subject matter superficially and does not connect the subject content nor notices causative relationships. She has difficulty with the problem-solving activities.

The Chemistry teacher says that Nenad is extremely shy and uncommunicative. He is not really successful in Chemistry and does not participate in class. The teacher considers that he can master the basic curriculum, but only at the end of a school year when he is basically forced to do it.

The Chemistry teacher says that Vedrana is less successful in Chemistry and rarely participates actively in class. Moreover, she is not so interested in the subject area nor wants to know more. She skips classes, avoids written and oral exams and is not consistent in studying.

#### **3.4.4.4. Discussion**

To sum up, it can be stated that teachers' beliefs about high-level-, low-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency students differ greatly. For instance, both English and Chemistry teacher believe that high-level-proficiency students are remarkably successful and that they show great interest in these subjects thus obtaining high achievements. On the other hand, both English and Chemistry teacher believe that low-level-proficiency students have less background knowledge in their subjects, are not interested in the subject content and lack incentive to learn more. With regard to teachers' beliefs about intermediate-level-proficiency students, they slightly vary. For example, the English teacher affirms that intermediate-level-proficiency students are moderately successful, and explains that by saying that they are competent when it comes to vocabulary but lack proficiency in language form. On the

contrary, the Chemistry teacher states that these students are not successful because they are not interested in the subject area, do not participate in class and do not want to know more.

### **3.5. Discussion**

The results presented in this research suggest that secondary school students' self-concepts in the foreign languages context vary considerably. After all of the students' profiles had been taken into account and after we had analysed their self-concepts and their beliefs about their FL aptitude, we came to the conclusion that certain differences seem to exist between high-level-, intermediate-level- and low-level-proficiency students. In fact, high-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency students seem to have more positive language learner self-concept than low-level-proficiency students do. Also, all of the high-level-proficiency students believe that they possess FL aptitude when it comes to acquiring English language, as opposed to low-level-proficiency students who believe that they do not possess this talent. Possibly the reason for this discrepancy could be found in their personal background, given that high-level-proficiency students are simply more invested and interested in maintaining a high level of knowledge in foreign languages, while low-level-proficiency students do not care that much or just do not have enough opportunities to compensate for the lack of pre-existing knowledge. Therefore, more positive self-concept of high-level-proficiency students in contrast to less positive self-concept of low-level-proficiency students could be accounted for different learner's beliefs about language learning. High-level-proficiency students believe they are very successful in learning languages and that they acquire them effortlessly, thus forming a positive self-concept, whereas low-level-proficiency students see themselves struggling to compensate for the lack of previous knowledge and to obtain new information, which seems to result in a less positive self-concept.

It was truly fascinating and intriguing to see how dynamic, individual and relative self-beliefs are. Even though our sample was very small and the study qualitative in nature, we think the results point to an interesting finding and that it is an overlap between our students' and their teacher's perceptions about their aptitude and language learning. As a matter of fact, high-level- and low-level-proficiency students' beliefs matched almost perfectly with those of their teacher. Both high-level-proficiency students and their teacher perceive that these learners are truly successful and talented when it comes to acquiring English language, whereas again both low-level-proficiency students and their teacher believe that these learners are not so successful and do not possess FL aptitude. However, what is even more interesting is the fact that intermediate-level-proficiency students see themselves as being successful language



learners, while their teacher does not perceive them in the same way. Maybe the reason for this contrast lies in the fact that these students do not distinguish themselves in class when compared to high-level-proficiency students, being that they lack skill in language form and do not focus enough on studying more for exams. On the other hand, these students do not perceive these factors as reasons for their unsuccessfulness. Quite the contrary, all of the intermediate-level-proficiency students see themselves as successful language learners who are genuinely interested in expanding and building their knowledge. Therefore, we may conclude that, against all odds, these students created positive self-concepts.

Therefore, we wish to propose that it is very important for educators to encourage language learners to develop positive but realistic self-concepts. By creating a learning environment which provides learners with a sense of security, does not pose any threat to their sense of self and can lead to a positive attitude and motivation for learning foreign languages, educators can enhance learners' positive self-concepts. It is evident from the findings presented in this research that learners' language self-concepts are part of a complex network of various self-beliefs which are all connected and processed differently within an individual. The common goal of both educators and students should be to form a positive foreign language self-concept by focusing on their own sense of progress. Learners need to believe that their language learning is something they can develop and improve, thus actively participating in the construction of their positive self-concepts.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The present study examined the secondary students' self-concepts about themselves as language learners with a special emphasis on the belief about their FL aptitude. The findings from the study highlight how complex the psychological processes surrounding the self-concept are, along with individual variation among learners. The data analysis showed that there are various differences among high-level-, intermediate-level- and low-level-proficiency students who took part in this study when various self-concepts were compared. The findings revealed that academic self-concept, as well as mother tongue self-concept influenced profoundly in the conceptualization of learners' foreign languages self-concept. Furthermore, it was discovered that high-level- and intermediate-level-proficiency students have more positive foreign languages self-concept than their low-level-proficiency peers. Being that the emphasis of the study was to examine to what extent students believe they possess FL aptitude, the findings indicate that high-level-proficiency students all have positive beliefs about their FL aptitude, while low-level-proficiency students claim that they do not possess that characteristic. In addition, their English language teacher offered the identical observation concerning the extent of students' foreign language aptitude.

With regard to limitations of the study, we wish to emphasise the obvious problem with the size of the sample. Our aim was a qualitative analysis and therefore the number of the participants was quite small. Nevertheless, the findings from this study suggest that both language learners and teachers have strong beliefs about the idea of possessing FL aptitude as well as distinct overall beliefs about themselves as language learners. The results may serve as a new starting point for further research. Our avenue may be to investigate possible correlations between language learners' self-concept about FL aptitude and FL aptitude test results in order to see if students who score higher on FL aptitude tests would perceive themselves as possessing this particular characteristic and vice versa.

## **Sažetak**

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je istražiti samopoimanje srednjoškolskih učenika u kontekstu usvajanja stranih jezika, s glavnim naglaskom na jezičnu nadarenost. Naime, cilj istraživanja bio je analizirati u kojoj mjeri učenici vjeruju da posjeduju urođeni "talent" za usvajanje jezika i kako percipiraju same sebe kao učenike stranih jezika. Nadalje, cilj je bio istražiti odnos između uvjerenja učitelja i učenika o jezičnoj nadarenosti. Drugim riječima, cilj je bio utvrditi postoje li razlike između načina na koji učenici percipiraju svoju jezičnu nadarenost i način na koji njihovi učitelji to percipiraju. Istraživanje je provedeno na devet srednjoškolskih učenika i dva profesora. Podaci su prikupljeni koristeći upitnik za učenike koji se sastojao od tri različita područja. Prvo područje bilo je usmjereno na rano djetinjstvo učenika i osobne podatke. Drugo područje bilo je usmjereno na učenikovo samopoimanje osnovnoškolskog i srednjoškolskog uspjeha, dok je u trećem području naglasak bio na izvanškolskim aktivnostima. Nadalje, upitnik za nastavnike zamišljen je kao uvid u profile studenata s pitanjima o njihovom uspjehu u određenom predmetu i njihovom stavu u učionici. Rezultati su pokazali da postoje razlike između samopoimanja iznimno uspješnih, srednje uspješnih i manje uspješnih učenika, kao i njihovih uvjerenja o jezičnoj nadarenosti. Zapravo, iznimno uspješni i srednje uspješni učenici imali su pozitivnije samopoimanje nego manje uspješni učenici. Također, iznimno uspješni i srednje uspješni učenici vjerovali su da posjeduju jezičnu nadarenost kada je riječ o usvajanju engleskog jezika, dok manje uspješni učenici nisu dijelili isto uvjerenje. Štoviše, profesor engleskog jezika imao je ista uvjerenja tvrdeći da iznimno uspješni i srednje uspješni učenici posjeduju talent za usvajanje jezika, dok manje uspješni učenici nisu jezično nadareni.

**Ključne riječi:** samopoimanje, jezična nadarenost, samouvjerenja, Engleski kao strani jezik

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Student’s profile of language development

#### Razvojno-jezični profil učenika

Opći podaci:

1. Kojeg si datuma rođen/a?

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2. Kojeg si spola?

---

3. Koji je očevo završeno obrazovanje i zanimanje?

---

4. Koje je majčino završeno obrazovanje i zanimanje?

---

Molim te da na ova pitanja odgovoriš uz pomoć roditelja (i bliže rodbine).

Rani počeci i predškolsko doba

1. Kako je majci tekla trudnoća s tobom? Je li bilo kakvih komplikacija ili je trudnoća tekla normalno?

---

2. Jesi li rođen/a prije termina, u terminu ili poslije termina poroda?

---

3. Koja ti je bila visina i težina pri porodu?

---

4. Kada si počeo/la gugutati (proizvoditi nerazumljive zvukove)?

---

5. Kada si počeo/la puzati?

---

6. Kada si počeo/la tepati (proizvoditi povezane glasove tipa ma-ma, ba-ba, da-da itd.)

---

7. Kada si počeo/la hodati?

---

8. Kada si počeo/la govoriti i koje su bile tvoje prve riječi?

---

---

9. Do koje godine si tepao/la i kada je nastupio tvoj potpuno razumljiv govor?

---

10. Kakav je bio tvoj govor u početku? Jesi li koristio jednostavne ili složene rečenice?  
(Ako se roditelji sjećaju, navedi neki primjer)

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---

11. Jesi li volio/voljela puno pričati i o čemu si najviše volio/voljela pričati i kome?

---

---

12. Sjećaš li se ti toga na isti način? Misliš li da je nešto bilo drugačije?

---

---

13. Koliko su ti čitali ili pričali priče odnosno koliko često si slušao/la priče (na kazetofonu, računalu)?

---

---

14. Jesi li kao dijete razgovarao/la s ostalim odraslim osobama, što ukućanima što poznanicima? O čemu si pričao/la s njima, koiko dugo i koliko često?

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---

15. Sjećaš li se ti toga na isti način? Misliš li da je nešto bilo drugačije?

---

---

16. Kada si krenuo/la u vrtić i koliko si ga dugo pohađao/la?

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17. Jesi li se u vrtiću volio/voljela družiti s ostalom djecom i jesi li lako sklapao/la prijateljstva?

---

---

18. Jesi li se u vrtiću volio/voljela igrati i koje su ti bile najdraže igre?

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---

19. Jesi li prije polaska u osnovnu školu znao pisati odnosno čitati i uolikoj mjeri (samo napisati/ pročitati svoje ime ili i više, ako da, što je to bilo?)

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Školsko doba

1. Koji ti je prosjek svih tvojih ocjena u osnovnoj školi?

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2. Misliš li da prosjek tvojih ocjena stvara realnu sliku tvog uspjeha?

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3. Koja je bila tvoja prosječna ocjena iz hrvatskog jezika u osnovnoj školi?



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4. Misliš li da je ta ocjena točna? Slažeš li se s tom ocjenom ili misliš da si zaslužio/la manju ili veću ocjenu i ako da, koju?

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5. Koji strani jezik(e) si počeo/la učiti u osnovnoj školi?

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6. Koja je tvoja prosječna ocjena iz stranog jezika u osnovnoj školi?

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7. Slažeš li se s tom ocjenom ili misliš da si zaslužio/la manju ili veću ocjenu i ako da, koju?

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8. Koji je tvoj prosjek dosadašnjih ocjena u srednjoj školi?

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9. Slažeš li se s tim ocjenama ili misliš da si zaslužio/la manje ili veće ocjene i ako da, zašto?

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10. Koja je tvoja prosječna ocjena iz hrvatskog jezika u srednjoj školi?

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11. Slažeš li se s tom ocjenom ili misliš da si zaslužio/la manju ili veću ocjenu i ako da, koju?

12. Koja je tvoja prosječna ocjena iz engleskog jezika?

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13. Slažeš li se s tom ocjenom ili misliš da si zaslužio/la manju ili veću ocjenu i ako da, koju?

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14. Koja je tvoja prosječna ocjena iz drugog stranog jezika i kojeg?

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15. Slažeš li se s tom ocjenom ili misliš da si zaslužio/la manju ili veću ocjenu i ako da, koju?

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a) U sljedećim tvrdnjama, koje se odnose na tvoje razdoblje školovanja u osnovnoj školi, odluči koliko se slažeš odnosno ne slažeš s tom tvrdnjom, pazeći pri tom na skalu:

1- uopće se ne slažem 2- ne slažem se 3- donekle se ne slažem

4- donekle se slažem 5- slažem se 6- u potpunosti se slažem

1. U osnovnoj školi sam bio/la uspješan učenik.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. U osnovnoj školi sam bio/la uspješan/na u hrvatskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. U osnovnoj školi sam bio/la uspješan/na u učenju stranih jezika.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. U osnovnoj školi sam bio/la znatiželjan/na i zanimao/la se za gradivo hrvatskog jezika.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. U osnovnoj školi sam bio/la znatiželjan/na i zanimao/la se za gradivo stranog jezika.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. U osnovnoj školi sam bio/la aktivan/na na nastavi.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. U osnovnoj školi sam samoinicijativno odgovarao/la na pitanja nastavnika.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. U osnovnoj školi sam lako pratio/la nastavu.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. U osnovnoj školi sam brzo pamtio/la nove informacije.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. U osnovnoj školi sam lako usvajao/la novo gradivo.	1	2	3	4	5	6

b) U sljedećim tvrdnjama, koje se odnose na tvoje trenutno razdoblje školovanja u srednjoj školi, odluči koliko se slažeš odnosno ne slažeš s tom tvrdnjom, pazeći pri tom na skalu:

1- uopće se ne slažem 2- ne slažem se 3- donekle se ne slažem

4- donekle se slažem 5- slažem se 6- u potpunosti se slažem

1. Smatram se uspješnim učenikom.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Smatram se dobrim govornikom hrvatskog jezika.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Smatram se uspješnim u učenju stranih jezika.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Uvijek aktivno sudjelujem u nastavi engleskog jezika.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Uvijek aktivno sudjelujem u nastavi drugih predmeta.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Na pitanja nastavnika odgovaram samoinicijativno.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. U radu u timu uvijek pridonosim svojim idejama.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Nije me strah iznijeti svoje mišljenje.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Uvijek želim znati više.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Brzo pamtim nove informacije.	1	2	3	4	5	6

c) U sljedećim tvrdnjama odluči koliko se slažeš odnosno ne slažeš s tom tvrdnjom, pazeći pri tom na skalu: 1- uopće se ne slažem 2- ne slažem se 3- donekle se ne slažem

4- donekle se slažem 5- slažem se 6- u potpunosti se slažem

1. Volim se baviti izvanškolskim aktivnostima.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Volim slušati glazbu na stranom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Volim gledati filmove na stranom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Volim čitati knjige na hrvatskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Volim čitati knjige na stranom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Zanimam se za kulturu stranog jezika kojeg učim.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Osjećam se sretno kada učim strani jezik.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Volio/ljela bih posjetiti zemlje govornog područja stranog jezika kojeg učim.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Smatram da je veoma korisno znati strane jezike.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Smatram da će mi znanje stranih jezika pomoći u ispunjavanju poslovnih ciljeva u budućnosti.	1	2	3	4	5	6

## Appendix B- Interview questions

- Did this questionnaire encourage you to talk to your parents and did it provoke some memories of your childhood? Do you remember if you already as a child talked a lot with other people or were you shy and didn't talk too much?
- Do you remember what you loved to talk about and to whom?
- Did you, as a child, like to listen to the grown-up conversations or not? Did you like to spend time with other children? Which were your favourite toys?
- Did you listen to bed-time stories? Do you remember which one was your favourite?
- Did you watch cartoons? In which languages? Which was your favourite cartoon? Why precisely that one?
- Did you listen to music? In which languages? Which one was your favourite? What music did you like to listen to the most?
- Have you ever travelled when you were a child either in Croatia or to foreign countries? When, where and for how long did you travel internationally for the first time?
- Have you ever participated in some sports activities and if yes, when did you start practicing them?
- Have you ever participated in other extra-curricular activities, such as dance, music school, language school or some other activity?
- When you think about the primary school, did you like Croatian language? Were you interested in the subject matter, that is, were you interested in the language itself, not only in the school subject? Did you enjoy learning grammar, spelling, and literature? Was it interesting for you?
- Later, when you started learning foreign language, did you like it? Was it easy for you or did you have to work hard in order to obtain a good mark?
- Did you have to study a lot in primary school or was it easy for you? Do you easily remember new information?
- How long does it take you to learn something? How do you study? Do you repeat constantly until you remember it?
- How fast do you acquire new vocabulary in English or German? Do you relate new words with the Croatian ones or do you just create new meaning in the foreign language?

- Do you consider yourself as an introverted or extroverted person? Why is that? Do you prefer working individually or in a team? When you are working in a team do you participate equally with your ideas or do you let others decide?
- Do you participate actively in class and do you stay attentive? Do you answer questions on your own initiative or do you wait to be asked on?
- Is Croatian language important to you? Is it important to speak it well and use it correctly and properly? Do you consider it crucial to know the grammar, spelling and literature or do you consider that speaking it daily in everyday communication is enough for you? Do you read books in Croatian? Do you listen to music or do you watch movies?
- Which is the most important subject area in school for you? Where do you see yourself in future? What do you want to do? Is there any particular university you want to enrol at?
- How successful are you in English language? What is the easiest for you and what is the hardest? What do you think is the reason for your success in English? Why are you successful? Do you think it is something you were born with or something else? Why do you think you are good or aren't good with languages? Do you study English at home more than it is required from you at school?
- What music do you listen to and how often? Do you find lyrics to songs? Do you watch movies and how often? Do you watch them with or without subtitles? Do you read books or magazines in foreign language? Do you communicate with someone in foreign language?
- Do you remember when you first heard a foreign language, what was your first impression of it, and namely of English?
- Where do you use English most frequently and how much will it be of use to you in future?

## Appendix C- Teacher's questionnaire

### Upitnik za nastavnika

Zamolila bih Vas da u sljedećim tvrdnjama odlučite koliko se slažete odnosno ne slažete s tom tvrdnjom, pazeći pri tom na skalu:

1- uopće se ne slažem 2- ne slažem se 3- donekle se ne slažem

4- donekle se slažem 5- slažem se 6- u potpunosti se slažem

1. Učenik je uspješan u ovom predmetu.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Učenik je ekstrovertiran.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Učenik aktivno sudjeluje na satu.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Učenik samoinicijativno odgovara na pitanja.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Učenik se zanima za gradivo.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Učenik želi znati više.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Učenik brzo pamti nove informacije.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Učenik kritički propituje sadržaj.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Učenik lako iznosi svoje mišljenje o temi.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Učenik posjeduje „talent“ za ovo područje.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Zamolila bih Vas da mi u sljedećem dijelu ukratko napišete nešto o tom djetetu, koje je vaše mišljenje o njemu i zašto tako mislite. Veliko hvala na Vašoj pomoći!

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