

**Maja Dolinar and Ana Mlekuž**

# Teachers' Intercultural Competencies and Foreign Language Learning and Teaching in Slovene Schools: Findings from the European Survey on Language Competences Study

**Abstract:** Using the data from the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), this paper aims to examine the intercultural competencies of Slovenian foreign language primary school teachers and how they translate these competencies into classrooms' foreign language learning success. Data shows that the biggest emphasis in the classroom is placed on spoken communication and vocabulary acquisition, followed by written communication, grammar and pronunciation, whereas the least emphasis is placed on learning about the culture and literature. Data also shows that only a small proportion of foreign language teachers participate in intercultural exchanges and training abroad, resulting in a limited approach that may not give language learners the necessary intercultural proficiency to communicate with others. Providing a more pragmatic instruction that is focused on an interdisciplinary approach to foreign language teaching and learning could enable students to gain cross-cultural awareness and pragmatic competence. This competence would prepare them to carry out conversations successfully and avoid cultural misunderstandings that might lead to communication breakdown and a possible loss of motivation to keep learning the language in the latter stages of their education. The importance of such an approach becomes evident as we are faced with an increasingly multicultural society and environment.

**Keywords:** English language learning and teaching, ESLC data, intercultural competencies, primary school

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*Maja Dolinar, PhD student, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kardeljeva ploščad 5, SI-1000 Ljubljana; e-mail: maja.dolinar@fdv.uni-lj.si*

*Ana Mlekuž, researcher, PhD student, Educational Research Institute, Gerbičeva 62, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; e-mail: ana.mlekuz@pei.si*

## Introduction

Culture and language constitute one of the main variables in studying human relations. In studying foreign language teaching, culture has often been neglected or treated as a supplementary topic. The European Union does not promote a specific foreign language teaching method *per se* but is inclined towards an integrated approach to learning and teaching, with an emphasis on the ability to understand and communicate in several languages. However, what are the competencies one must have to truly understand and communicate effectively in a language different from one's own?

Foreign language teachers aim to give their students the necessary competencies to communicate with target language users, either native target language speakers or those who use it as a second or foreign language (Clyne 1994; Pennycook 1994). Learning about culture within foreign language learning can contribute to the success in language learning, as Tseng (2002, p. 13) says: 'success in language learning is conditional upon the acquisition of cultural knowledge: language learners acquire cultural background knowledge in order to communicate and to increase their comprehension in the target language'. This process is known as the communicative competence, which is the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language but also to know when, where, and to whom to use those sentences appropriately (Hymes 1972). Communicative competence involves everything that the foreign language user needs to know to use the language appropriately in a specific cultural setting.

Using the data from the European Survey on Language Competences (ESLC), the paper aims to examine the intercultural competencies of Slovenian foreign language primary school teachers and how they translate into classrooms' foreign language learning success. The paper is divided into four parts. First, we look at the linkages between language and culture and define our research problem, then focus on the description of the methodology behind the ESLC and present the main findings from the analysis. We end with a discussion and presentation of the main findings, limitations and future research directions.

## Defining the research problem: Language and culture in teaching

Language carries syntactic, semantic and pragmatic meanings for language users to communicate (Brooks 1997). However, culture also carries meanings since cultural meanings are expressed through patterns of behaviour, such as language. Because both language and culture carry meanings, they both have a function of communication. In today's globalised world, a functional communicative competence may not be sufficient since an understanding of, and living in, an interconnected world requires building bridges across universes of knowledge and beliefs, languages and cultures. To create a bridge between language and culture and to facilitate language teaching, it is necessary that a language teacher be a philosopher, a geographer, a historian, an etymologist and a literary critic. Similarly, Altman (1988) states that every teacher should be a developer of communication competence, a dialectician, a value-promoting, a communications analyst, a sociologist, an anthropologist, an intercultural analyst and trainer, and an expert in intercultural studies. Language teaching and learning cannot be reduced to an assimilation of a system of sounds and letters but needs to take into consideration the cultural element as well. One needs to understand culturally different norms of interaction and various values of others to communicate across languages and cultures successfully (Saville-Troike 2003). As stated by Schulz (2007), one needs to be aware that sometimes linguistically correct sentences may cause misunderstanding, confusion or even serious clashes when they are used in different cultural contexts. Therefore, culture needs to be emphasised in foreign language learning and teaching.

Intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretive, transactional and contextual process in which the degree of difference between people is large and significant enough to create different interpretations and expectations about how to communicate competently (Lustig and Koester 2003, p. 51). As stated by Wiseman (2003, p. 192), intercultural communication competence 'involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures'. Byram (1997) proposes a model of intercultural communicative competence that involves five components: (1) attitudes (values and beliefs, curiosity and openness, relativising self and valuing others), (2) knowledge of self and others in communication, knowledge of other cultures and knowledge of the process of interaction, (3) skills for interpreting, relating, discovering and interacting, and (4) critical cultural awareness. Knowledge about a culture, including sociocultural information about such things as everyday living, interpersonal relations, values and beliefs, body language and social conventions, is obviously important for language learners. As the Council of Europe points out, this culture-specific knowledge needs special attention because it is 'likely to lie outside the learner's previous experience and may well be distorted by stereotypes' (2001, p. 102).

Intercultural language teaching and learning refocus the goal of learning by shifting away from a narrow focus on linguistic or communicative competence and towards a more holistic goal of intercultural competence (Byram 1997, p. 7). Intercultural approaches to language learning and teaching are founded on the belief that learning a foreign language can have a positive influence on students' attitudes

towards other cultures and, more broadly, on their intercultural competence (Newton et al. 2010). All this, in turn, requires appropriate intercultural competence from the foreign language teacher and his or her willingness to incorporate classroom tasks and communicative opportunities for intercultural learning. However, are these ideas implemented in reality? Very little is known about how primary school teachers experience the international environment and what encourages their motivation and success in including these experiences in their teaching, despite an increase in conversations of internationalising education on all levels to meet global challenges. In this paper, we are interested in what kind of intercultural competencies Slovenian foreign language primary school teachers have, and if and how they use these competencies in their classrooms. Do they contribute to language learning success? The theory states that including the intercultural element in language learning and teaching can be done by including specially designed activities and finding opportunities to guide learners' attention to the various elements in Byram's model (1997), such as their own values and beliefs, knowledge of self, the ability to interpret indirectness in discourse, critical awareness of the power of language, and so on. In the next part, we look at the current state of foreign language teaching in Slovenian primary schools.

## **Methodology**

To examine the intercultural competencies of Slovenian foreign language primary school teachers and see how they translate into classrooms' foreign language learning success, we used Slovenian data for the English language from the ESLC. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the ESLC was established to provide participating countries with comparative data on foreign language competence as well as insights into good practice in language learning (European Commission, 2012a). The aim was also to contribute to the goals of the European Commission to improve the knowledge of fundamental language skills in Europe (2002) and to the establishment of an indicator of language competence (2005). The survey included 14 European countries covering 16 education systems: Belgium with three different linguistic groups (foreign language education systems), Bulgaria, Croatia, England, Estonia, France, Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

### *Sample design*

The main ESLC study was conducted in February and March 2011 on a sample of approximately 70 schools (1,500 students) for each tested language in each participating education system. The participating students were attending the last year of lower secondary education (ISCED2) or the second year of upper secondary education (ISCED3; European Commission, 2012b) and had been learning the foreign language being tested for at least one entire academic year before

testing. The students included in the survey were between 13 and 16 years old; in Slovenia, the average age was 14. The survey also included 5,000 foreign language teachers and 2,500 school principals who answered an online questionnaire about the foreign language environment at their school, similar to the questionnaire for students. The sample was designed to ensure the representativeness of the selected test population for each education system.

ESLC used a two-stage stratified sampling design, which means that the sampling was conducted in two stages. The first stage consisted of sampling individual schools where the target population is enrolled. A minimum of 71 schools per country per language was sampled. The second stage of the sampling procedure consisted of sampling students (target population) at the selected schools. On average, 25 students in the target population were sampled per school with equal probability. With these sampling procedures, the representativeness of the selected population for each educational system and each tested language was ensured.

Each selected student first answered a 'routing test'. Depending on the score obtained on this test, students were assigned to one of three versions of the language test, which overlaps the three CEFR levels: easy (a1-A2), intermediate (A2-B1) or difficult (B1-B2 test). This positioning helped to ensure sampled students received a test closely matching their ability and, therefore, increasing the validity of the test results. Each student then answered a language test in two out of three tested competencies (listening, reading, writing) matched to their ability and a background questionnaire.

Principals and language teachers were also included in the survey. Both were administered background questionnaires on the topic of language teaching and learning in sampled schools.

	N	Gender	
		Female (%)	Male (%)
<b>students</b>	1.586	50	50
<b>teachers</b>	174	94	6
<b>schools</b>	72		

*Table 1: Slovenian sample for English language characteristics*

In Slovenia, 1,586 students at the end of ISCED 2 (grade 9) were included in the English language sample. Students' score in English listening and English writing was statistically significant above the ESLC average. However, students' scores in English reading were equal to the ESLC average. Moreover, 174 teachers were included in the survey, of which 94% were female and 6% were male, while 72 principals answered the school questionnaire.

### *Instruments and measurements*

The language tests were based on the CEFR but needed to be adjusted to the socio-cognitive characteristics of the tested population (14- and 15-year-olds). SurveyLang professionals determined the testing competences at each reference level of the CEFR (A1 to B2). The language tests consisted of three language skills—listening, reading and writing—with each student being tested in two of these three skills.

In addition to language tests, the participants (students, teachers and school principals) completed a questionnaire. Although each group of participants answered a different questionnaire, the common purpose of all three questionnaires was to collect additional information about language learning in the participating country.

To test *Achievement* (plausible values), the ESLC uses a matrix-sampling approach where achievement items are divided into groups, blocks or sets, and each achievement booklet is then made up of these sets of items according to a systematic arrangement (European Commission, 2012b). To derive student achievement scores for analysis and reporting, the Rasch one-parameter item response theory (IRT) model was used. In the ESLC, plausible values<sup>1</sup> were designed as draws from the posterior distribution of ability for each student, whereby the prior distribution was adjusted in a hierarchical Bayesian fashion for every individual based on information from the questionnaires, using a latent regression model. The model used for the distribution for ability contains the Student Questionnaire indices together with a school mean and a school variance, which accounts correctly for any effect of the teacher, school or higher-level indices. Moreover, interclass correlation is also taken fully into account in this inclusion (European Commission, 2012b).

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<sup>1</sup> Plausible value variables are imputed values that resemble individual test scores and have approximately the same distribution as the latent trait being measured (American Institute for Research, 2008). Plausible values are imputations of test scores based on responses to a limited number of assessment items and a set of background variables. They are created as computational approximations for consistent assessment of the characteristics of a population in which there are not enough data available for an accurate assessment of individuals' capabilities. Plausible values are random draws from an empirically derived distribution of proficiency values, which depend on the observed values of the proficiency assessment items and background variables. Randomly selected draws from the distribution represent the values of the distribution of the results of all individuals in the population with similar characteristics and the same response pattern. These randomly selected values, or imputations, are representative of the distribution of outcomes in a population of individuals who share similar background characteristics as the individual for whom the plausible values in the database are calculated (American Institute for Research, 2008). Plausible values make a significant contribution to studying the relationship between ability and contextual information. In the ESLC, plausible values were designed as draws from the posterior distribution of ability for each student, whereby the prior distribution was adjusted in a hierarchical Bayesian fashion for every individual based on information from the questionnaires, using a latent regression model. The model that was used for the distribution for ability contains the Student Questionnaire indices together with a school mean and a school variance, which correctly accounts for any effect of the teacher, school or higher-level indices. Moreover, interclass correlation is also fully taken into account in this inclusion (European Commission, 2012b). The plausible level variables that were used in this paper were subsequently calculated based on plausible value variables.

The regression analysis consisted of three indices. The index of *Economic, social and cultural status* (ESCS - I08\_ST\_A\_S19B) is composed of three variables: home possessions (HOMEPOS), parental occupation (HISEI) and higher parental education expressed as years of schooling (PARED). The index of *Perceived usefulness of English language and English language learning* (I09\_ST\_M\_S33B) is a latent variable based on responses to three questions: (1) the usefulness of English for different purposes (travelling, personal life, future work and so on) (SQ33), (2) liking different school subjects (SQ34), and (3) the usefulness of different school subjects (SQ35). The index of *Perceived difficulty of English language learning* (I09\_ST\_M\_S48A) is composed of responses to question SQ48 (How difficult is it for you to learn: to write English, speak English, understand spoken English and so on) and is a latent variable.

Moreover, we used variables from the teacher and school questionnaires to investigate internationalisation activities at the school, teacher and class level. These variables are as follows: the number of teachers participating in teacher exchange visits to work or study abroad for longer than one month (PQ17), the number of teachers from abroad who came to work in Slovene schools for more than one month (PQ18), the funding for the exchange visits (PQ19), the frequency of teachers' longer (more than one month) stays abroad for different reasons (TQ12), the frequency of teachers' participation in an in-service training at different institutions in the last five years (TQ31), teachers' involvement in the organisation of different activities at school (TQ41), teachers' perceived importance of different areas while teaching English in class (TQ53), the frequency of teaching different skills in English class that includes English culture and literature (TQ55), the frequency of teachers' home assignments for English language students covering different areas (TQ56) and teachers' perceived importance of different areas while deciding on English final grade (TQ59).

## Analysis and findings

Data analysis was performed with SPSS to calculate the percentage and means, and IDB Analyser for conducting regression analysis.

### *Regression analysis*

The results present the regression analyses where the achievement score in listening, reading and writing for the English language is predicted by perceived usefulness of English language and English language learning and by perceived difficulty of English language learning. Moreover, we also included economic, social and cultural status in the regression models as a control variable.

	<b>b (s. e.)</b>	<b>β (s. e.)</b>	<b>R<sup>2*</sup> (s. e.)</b>
<b>listening</b>			
constant	1,18 (0,16)*		
ESCS	0,27 (0,05)*	0,21 (0,04)*	
Perception of usefulness of English language and English language learning	0,50 (0,07)*	0,29 (0,04)*	
Perceived difficulty of English language learning	-0,39 (0,05)*	-0,31 (0,03)*	0,36 (0,03)*
<b>reading</b>			
constant	0,56 (0,16)*		
ESCS	0,32 (0,05)*	0,20 (0,03)*	
Perception of usefulness of English language and English language learning	0,63 (0,06)*	0,32 (0,03)*	
Perceived difficulty of English language learning	-0,51 (0,05)	-0,33 (0,03)*	0,40 (0,03)*
<b>writing</b>			
constant	-0,27 (0,34)*		
ESCS	0,44 (0,08)*	0,17 (0,04)*	
Perception of usefulness of English language and English language learning	1,10 (0,15)*	0,34 (0,04)*	
Perceived difficulty of English language learning	-0,88 (0,09)*	-0,36 (0,04)*	0,44 (0,03)*

Table 2: Predictive power of perceived usefulness of English language and English language learning and perceived difficulty of English language learning

Note: The data are weighted with Total Student Weight (TOTWGT). R<sup>2</sup> is adjusted R<sup>2</sup>. Statistically significant coefficients (p > 0,05) are marked with \*. Standard errors are in brackets.

The data shows that all three variables used are significant predictors of achievement for all three skills (listening, reading and writing). In all three models, the strongest predictor is perceived difficulty of English language learning and the weakest economic, social and cultural status.

### *Principal/school questionnaire analysis*

In this part, we present the results of principals' (N = 72) answers to questions on: the number of teachers participating in teacher exchange visits to work or study abroad for longer than one month (PQ17), the number of teachers from abroad, who came to work to Slovene schools for more than one month (PQ18), the funding for the exchange visits (PQ19).



Sum of teachers on all participating (72) schools	
Teachers of English language	4
Teachers of languages other than English	3
Teachers of subjects other than languages	56
TOTAL number of teachers	63

Table 3: In the previous school year, how many teachers participated in teacher exchange visits to work or study in another country for longer than one month?

The table shows that only four teachers of the English language, three teachers of languages other than English and 56 teachers of other subjects (63 altogether) of all teachers in 72 schools participated in teacher exchange visits to work or study in another country for longer than one month in the school year 2010.

Sum of teachers in all participating (72) schools	
Guest teachers of English language	4
Guest teachers of languages other than English	1
Guest teachers of subjects other than languages	1
TOTAL number of guest teachers	6

Table 4: In the previous year, how many teachers from abroad came to work in your school for longer than one month?

In the school year 2010, four guest teachers of English language, one teacher of a language other than English and one teacher of subjects other than languages (six teachers altogether) came to work or study in 72 participating schools for more than one month.

	Yes	No
Through EU, such as the Comenius grant	10 (17%)	50 (83%)
Through the government (including local, regional, state and national governments)	3 (5%)	54 (95%)
Through benefactors' donations, bequests, sponsorships or parent fundraisings	1 (2%)	56 (98%)

Table 5: In the previous school year, did any of the teachers or guest teachers receive funding for exchange visits in the following ways?

\* Values outside the brackets are absolute frequencies, values in the brackets are percentages.

Only 17% of school principals report that the European Union financed a guest teacher at their school through the Comenius donation, and only 5% of principals report that the financing of guest teachers was through government and charities, grants, legacies, sponsorships or funds collected with the help of parent organisations.

*Teacher questionnaire analysis*

In this section, we present the results of principals' answers to questions on the frequency of teachers' longer (more than one month) stays abroad for different reasons (TQ12), the frequency of teachers' participation in an in-service training at different institutions in the last five years (TQ31), teachers' involvement in the organisation of different activities at school (TQ41), teachers' perceived importance of different areas while teaching English in class (TQ53), the frequency of teaching different skills in English class that include English culture and literature (TQ55), the frequency of teachers' home assignments for English language students covering different areas (TQ56) and teachers' perceived importance of different areas while deciding on English final grade (TQ59).

N = 174	Average
For holiday	1,1
For study or following a course	0,8
For other jobs than teaching	0,3
For teaching	0,1
For living with your family	0

*Table 6: How often have you stayed more than one month in a non-Slovenian speaking country, for the following reasons?*

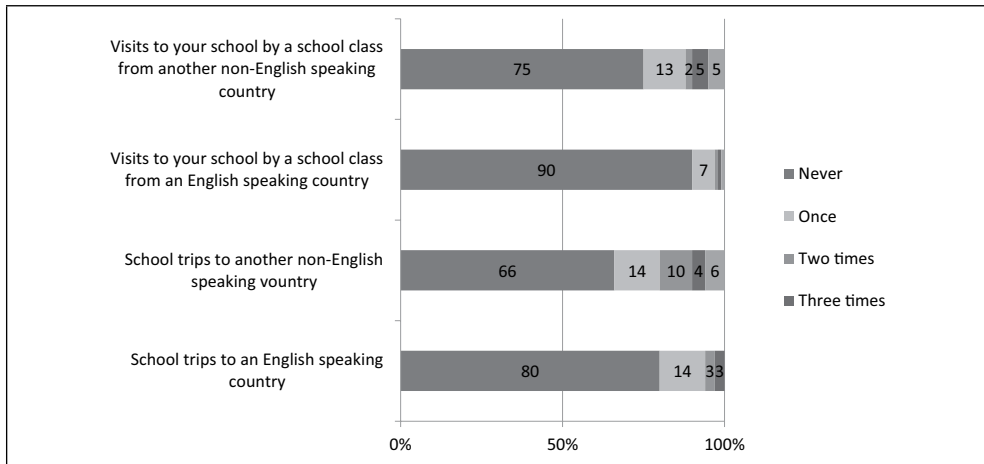
On average, each teacher visited a non-Slovenian speaking country for more than one month for holidays only once in their lifetime. This includes also the cases when teachers visited a non-Slovene speaking country for study or completed a course. None of the teachers lived in a non-Slovenian speaking country for more than a month with their family.

N = 174	Average
At the school where you teach	9,7
At another institution in Slovenia	8,0
Online	1,5
At an institute in a non-English speaking country other than Slovenia	0,5
At an institute in an English-speaking country	0,3

*Table 7: In the past five years, how often have you participated in in-service training at the following places?*

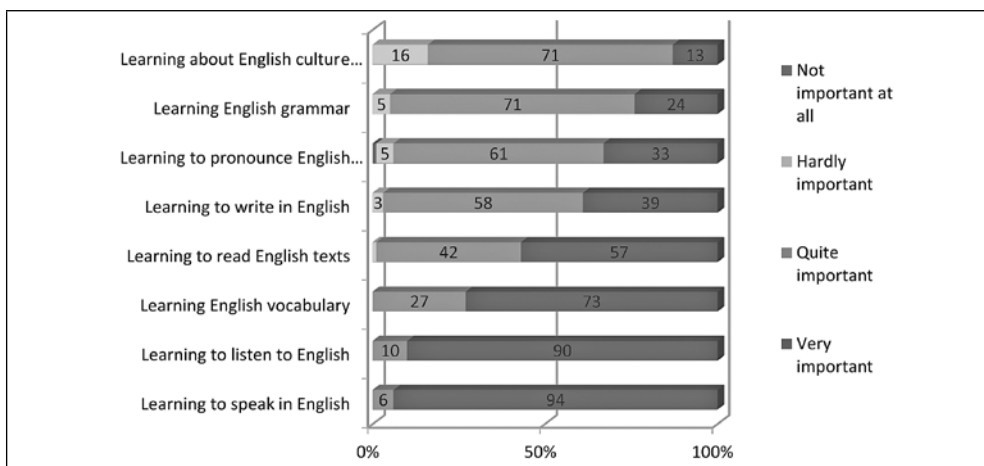
On average, each teacher has participated in approximately ten in-service trainings at the school where they teach in the past five years. Moreover, each teacher has participated in approximately eight in-service trainings at another institution

in Slovenia in the last five years. However, a very small number of teachers have participated in an in-service training at an institute in a non-English speaking country (other than Slovenia) and an institute in an English-speaking country.



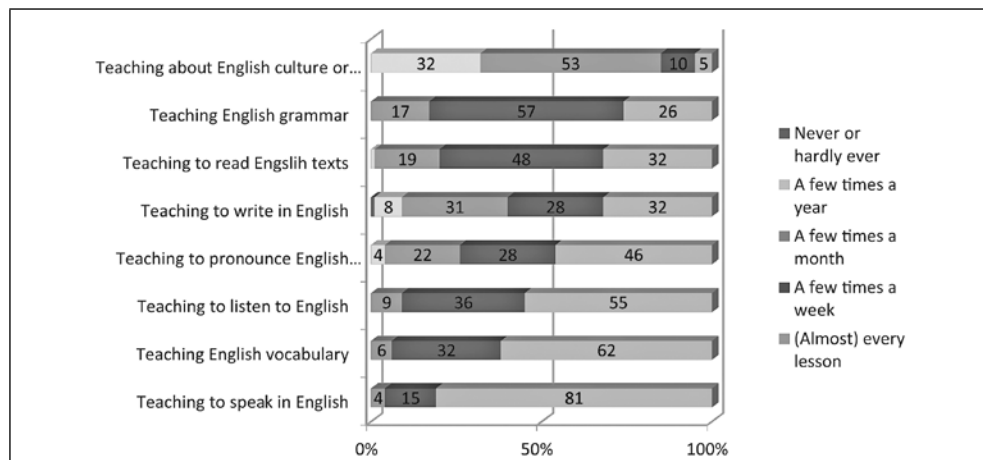
Graph 1: In the past three years how often were you involved in the organisation of the following activities at school (N =174)?

On average, the teachers have rarely cooperated in the activities described in the Graph 1. The most common activity was school trips to another non-English speaking country - 20% of the teachers participated in this activity two or more times in the last three years. Moreover, 12% of the teachers participated in visits to their school by a school class from another non-English speaking country two or more times in the past three years.



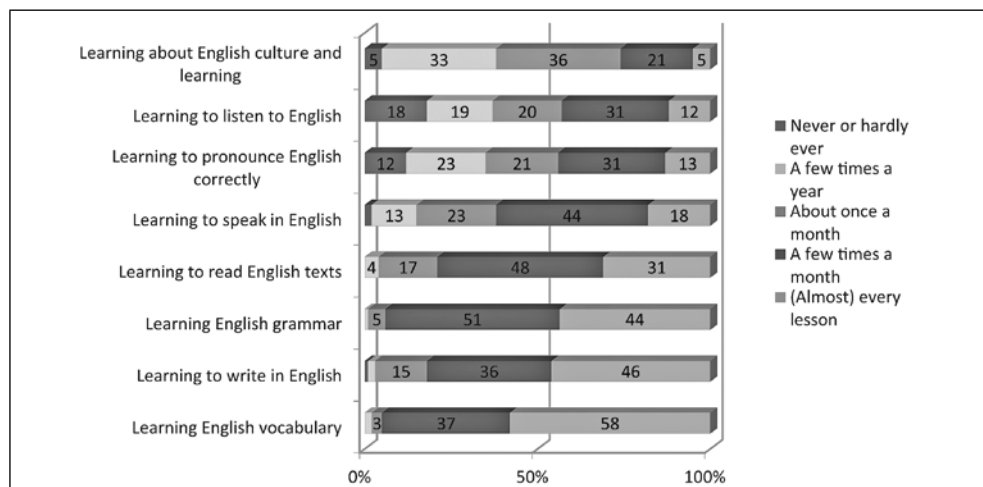
Graph 2: In your opinion, how important is it that your students learn the following? (N = 174)

The data show that the majority of teachers think (90% or more) that learning to speak English and learning to listen to English is very important. A large number of teachers (73%) also think that learning English vocabulary is very important. Moreover, 71% of teachers think that learning about English culture and English literature is quite important, 13% of teachers think that this is very important, whereas 16% of teachers think that this is hardly important.



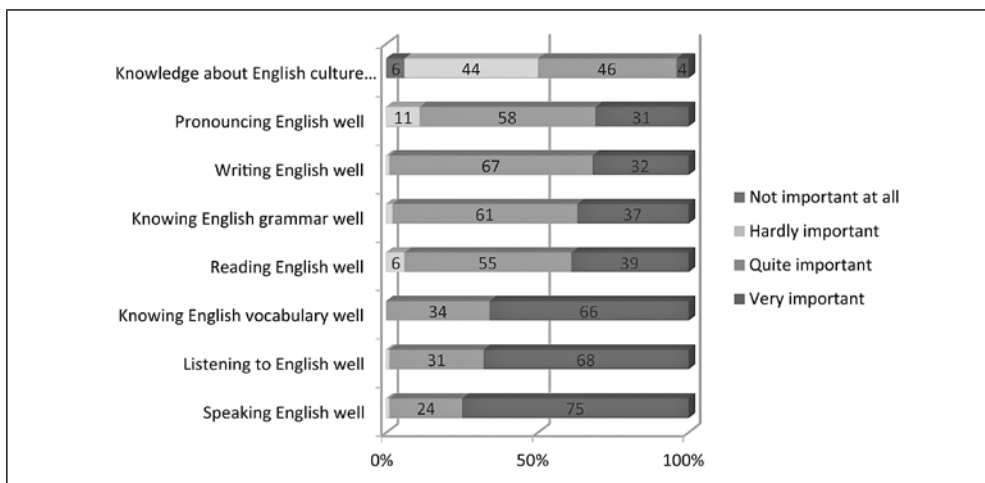
Graph 3: In general, how often do you teach the following to an English class? (N = 174)

Graph 3 shows that 81% of teachers teach how to speak English (almost) every lesson and 15% a few times a week. Teachers teach English vocabulary a little less often—62% of teachers teach vocabulary (almost) every lesson and 32% a few times a week. The data also show that 32% of teachers teach about English culture or literature only a few times a year, 53% of teachers teach this a few times a month, and only 15% of teachers teach this a few times a week or (almost) every lesson.



Graph 4: In general, how often do you give English class homework or assignments aimed at the following? (N = 174)

The most common assignment given to students for their homework is learning English vocabulary since 58% of the teachers gives this for a homework assignment (almost) every lesson and 37% a few times a month. Learning English grammar is also a quite common homework assignment, where 44% of teachers give this for homework (almost) every lesson and 51% a few times a month. Only 5% of teachers address learning about English culture and literature for a homework assignment (almost) every lesson while 21% of teachers give this for homework assignments a few times a month, and 38% of teachers give this assignment for homework a few times a year, never or hardly ever.



Graph 5: How important are the following when you determine a mark for the final grade of students for the subject of English? (N = 174)

All teachers estimate that knowing English vocabulary well is very important or quite important when determining the final grade of students. Almost all teachers (99%) think that listening to English well, knowing English grammar well and writing English well is also very or quite important when determining the final grade of students, whereas 50% of teachers think that knowledge about English culture and/or literature is not important at all or hardly important when determining the students' final English grade. Only 4% of teachers think that knowledge about English culture and/or literature is very important in determining the students' English final grade.

## Discussion

Our analysis shows that, surprisingly, economic, social and cultural status is the weakest predictor as opposed to both used attitudes (perceived usefulness of English language and English language learning; the perceived difficulty of English language learning). Therefore, teachers should strive to change students' attitudes

towards language learning, which can result in substantially higher learning outcomes even for students from families with lower economic, social and cultural status. Their attitudes towards learning English explain the variance in students' achievement of reading comprehension, written communication competence and listening comprehension. An important antecedent of listening comprehension is exposure to the English language through various media. Based on the results of the analysis, it would be advisable to put more stress on how to build a positive attitude towards English and foreign languages in general.

The analysis also shows that the biggest emphasis in the classroom is placed on spoken communication and vocabulary, with less emphasis placed on written communication, grammar and pronunciation. The least emphasis is put on culture and literature in comparison to other aspects of teaching and learning foreign languages. The data also show that only a small proportion of foreign language teachers participate in intercultural exchanges and training abroad. We should stress that learning and teaching foreign languages should go beyond the level of acquiring grammatical rules, which is something that Slovenian English language teachers acknowledge in their answers to 'what should be' but lack actual classroom implementation. Foreign language learners need to know how to use the target language in the situated context (Neuner 1997). As Stern (1992, p. 205) states, it is impossible to teach a language without its culture because 'culture is the necessary context for language use'. More emphasis should be placed on learning about the foreign culture to help pupils to communicate successfully in sociocultural contexts. The language-culture link is significant in foreign language education because culture plays a role in helping foreign language learners to be proficient in the target language (Nault 2006). As Alptekin (2002, p. 58) puts it, 'learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers'. From learning a new language, foreign language learners experience a new world.

In Slovenia, the increased teacher mobility offers many opportunities for professional development; it will certainly stimulate the integration of different forms, strategies and contents into foreign language teaching, which can be an additional support for achieving higher levels in students' knowledge. The teacher is the one who can use foreign language lessons to talk about his or her experiences abroad and why, in today's world, knowledge of foreign languages is important and useful. The practicality of the knowledge of foreign languages and the impact of this knowledge on the individual's social life and mental flexibility should be stressed in foreign language learning and teaching. It is not trivial that the learning of foreign languages develops intercultural competencies crucial in developing respect amongst nations, cultures and races. The ignorance of the neighbourhood language, culture, beliefs and customs usually leads to prejudices and negative feelings but when we create awareness of that difference and introduce students to the reasons for certain actions, behaviours and historical facts, the possibility of establishing respect for others is much greater. It is also important that learning activities be as authentic as possible, similar to those whom an individual will meet in his or

her lifetime and will have to understand them properly to show an appropriate response. That is why travelling to foreign countries, school exchanges, visits to international students in classrooms and conversations with pupils are forms of language learning that support or maintain motivation to learn foreign languages as well as give meaning to it.

## Conclusion

One of the goals of learning and teaching a foreign language should be developing intercultural communicative competence. Byram (2006, pp. 17-18) says that there should be four overall aims of intercultural language learning, namely:

- The acquisition of the linguistic and cultural skills of intercultural communication;
- The development of an aptitude for critical thinking, questioning and challenging assumptions;
- A change from exclusive identification with familiar communities and, in particular, the nation-state and national identity, to inclusive identification with others with related interests in other societies and the acquisition of new international identities, which complement national and local identities;
- Taking action through involvement with people of other societies and liberating oneself and others from assumptions and ways of being and doing that are oppressive or constraining.

All these goals have important consequences for pedagogy, since they instruct that classroom tasks and communicative opportunities for intercultural education be used in classrooms, such as discussing the values and beliefs of students, investigation of the knowledge of self, critical awareness of the power of language, and so on.

We believe that more emphasis should be placed on intercultural exchanges of teachers and students, as it is well known that learning a language in multilingual and multicultural groups may lead to interesting conversations amongst learners if teachers permit deviation from a target language and target-culture focus. In the language classroom, issues of language, culture and cultures of learning, rarely addressed in the students' home environment, do not remain unspoken. Instead, these issues are discussed in a context where every student is a learner of a foreign language and a newcomer to an unfamiliar culture.

This paper aimed to examine the intercultural competencies of Slovenian foreign language primary school teachers and how they translate into classrooms' foreign language learning success. The main limitation of the study is the focus on analysing data from the ESCL 2011 but not more current data. The study was, unfortunately, a one-time study that, for the first time on the European level, measured how different competencies transform into the learning achievement of

students. Since 2011, significant progress has been made regarding inclusion of teachers and pupils in various international exchanges and projects, so it would be very interesting to compare the increase in internationalisation with current achievements. Such data would support or reject our claims that more exposure to the international environment leads to higher intercultural competencies that then translate into students' success in learning foreign languages. Further studies should investigate this link in more detail.

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Maja DOLINAR (Univerza v Ljubljani, Slovenija) in Ana MLEKUŽ (Pedagoški inštitut, Slovenija)

### **MEDKULTURNE KOMPETENCE UČITELJEV TER UČENJE IN POUČEVANJE TUJIH JEZIKOV V SLOVENSkih ŠOLAH: UGOTOVITVE RAZISKAVE ESLC**

**Povzetek:** Namen prispevka je na podlagi podatkov Evropske raziskave o jezikovnih kompetencah proučiti medkulturne kompetence osnovnošolskih učiteljev tujih jezikov in ugotoviti, kako se te kažejo v znanju angleščine. Podatki razkrivajo, da učitelji pri poučevanju največ časa namenijo govorni komunikaciji in pridobivanju besedišča, sledijo pisna komunikacija, slovnica in izgovarjava, najmanj časa pa namenijo učenju kulture in literature. Podatki še kažejo, da le majhen delež učiteljev tujih jezikov sodeluje v medkulturnih izmenjavah in usposabljanjih v tujini. Posledično učenci ne pridobijo nujno dovolj medkulturnih kompetenc, saj je pristop k poučevanju omejen na slovnico in besedišče. Izvajanje pouka, ki bi bilo osredotočeno na interdisciplinarnost v poučevanju in učenju tujih jezikov, bi učencem omogočilo pridobivanje medkulturne zavesti in spodbudilo razvijanje medkulturne kompetence. Ta kompetenca bi učence opremila z znanjem medkulturnega komuniciranja, s čimer bi se lahko izognili kulturnim nesporazumom, ki bi lahko povzročili komunikacijski šum in vodili k izgubi motivacije učencev, da se tuji jezik učijo tudi na nadaljnjih stopnjah izobraževanja. Pomen takega pristopa postane očiten še zlasti v večkulturni družbi in okolju.

**Ključne besede:** učenje in poučevanje angleščine, podatki raziskave ESLC, medkulturne kompetence, osnovna šola

**Elektronski naslov:** maja.dolar@fdv.uni-lj.si

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