Elementary School EFL Learning Experience: A Needs Analysis

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Abstract—**Regular curriculum modifications and the shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered paradigm in educational institutions are meant to enhance the teaching-learning process and fulfill learners' needs as successfully as possible. This study aimed to examine learners' attitudes towards learning English, their needs/wants, learning preferences, strategies, and lesson topics. Moreover, it also investigated the differences in learning preferences based on grade level. The data were gathered from a survey administrated to 200 elementary school students in Central Bosnia and Herzegovina. The findings illustrated that the participants generally have a positive attitude towards learning English with more significant extrinsic reasons motivating them to learn it. Regarding students' needs, the analysis revealed that overall, students found writing the most challenging and speaking the most desirable language skill. Furthermore, the majority of the participants reported that they like to learn by reading texts or stories, finding the discussion in the classroom the most annoying classroom activity. While learning vocabulary by translating new words is regarded as the most beneficial method, doing written exercises at school presents the most significant way of acquiring grammar. Moreover, the study identified a significant influence of a grade level on the preferred ways of learning English.**

Index Terms—**need analysis, learners' attitudes, grade levels, learning strategies**

I. INTRODUCTION

Although the intellectual perspective is considered valuable, language learning is still directed by psychological and social features, which rely mainly on learners' motivation and beliefs about learning the target language (Padwick, 2010). In other words, learners' capability to master a target language is not only manipulated by mental competence but also learners' beliefs about the language being learned (Abidin et al., 2012). Thus, interdisciplinary investigation argues that learner attitudes about learning are closely connected with self-concept, self-efficacy, personality, motivation, and levels of expectancy (Bernat, 2004).

The current study focuses on the investigation of learners' attitudes towards EFL learning and the analysis of their needs and preferences. Lawson (1979) describes needs as "something that is recognized but is not in any sense discovered, and its existence derives from whatever criteria are thought to be relevant in making the diagnoses" (p. 37). This implies that in an effort to identify needs, one would have to conduct some kind of evaluation of the current situation, and based on it plan further steps. Therefore, the purpose of a needs analysis (NA) is to plan the aims of a course (Vaghari & Shuib, 2013), develop a curriculum that will accommodate to the needs of a particular group of learners (Iwai et al., 1999). Berwick (1989) defines need as the gap between "what is," referring to the present stage of learners' knowledge and ability, and "what should be," alluding to the target situation criteria (p. 65). Hence, a NA helps in assessing the current situation but with the final aim of reaching the effective course outcomes (Mackey, 1987). In other words, it helps modify the existing course by inspecting and adjusting existing materials according to the needs of learners in a specific teaching condition, but also maximize their learning perspective (McDonough & Shaw, 1993). As such, it contributes to making the learning context more learner-centered, as learners' opinion is taken into account, which might change their overall attitude to the learning process (Fakeye, 2010).

When it comes to classification, needs are mostly classified based on the reason for learning the language. Accordingly, Alderson (1980) distinguished between four categories of needs. First, a formal need, that is the need to fulfill the institutions' requests, for example, passing the course. The second one is an actual need, i.e., what a learner is supposed to do with the language once he/she has acquired it. The next one is a hypothetical goal need, referring to a better career in the future, while the last type is the want. The first and the last are related to the immediate learning context, so they comprise a process-oriented category, whereas the other two belong to a 'future-oriented' category. According to Widdowson (1983), the future-oriented type has to do with program goals, while the process-oriented is related to pedagogic objectives. Supplementarily, Brindley (1989) pointed out two categories of needs, namely objective needs attainable from exact information about learners, the use of language in day-to-day interaction, present language competence, and its difficulties, and subjective needs referring to cognitive and physical needs, such as

personality, belief in oneself, attitude, wants as well as learning expectations. The author also reported that objective needs are more easily obtainable through data gathering such as interviews, tests, surveys, while on the contrary, identifying subjective needs is rather challenging for the sake of the "elusive nature of the variables" (p. 70).

Nevertheless, it is essential to keep in mind that needs are dynamic rather than unchangeable. Therefore, to avoid misunderstanding that is likely to occur between learners' needs and school curriculum, it is recommended that curriculum designers analyze learners' needs periodically to determine if they are still the same (Jackson, 2005). Additionally, in order to adjust learning aims as new needs emerge, it is agreed that a NA should be conducted throughout the course. Thus, feedback from learners can be used as a starting point for modifying learning motives.

Even though learners' attitudes, beliefs, and needs are well explored worldwide, in our context they are rather underresearched, and no single study investigating learners' needs in terms of English learning has been conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H). This research aims to shed some light on this issue investigating the stances of 200 elementary school students from Central B&H, with the focus on their attitude towards EFL learning, their needs, learning preferences and the differences among them based on grade levels.

II. Literature Review

Bearing in mind that English nowadays enjoys the status of a global language, it is not surprising that worldwide students share positive attitude towards learning it (Dwaik & Shehadeh, 2010; Saheb, 2014). B&H is no exception in this respect (Ahmetović, Bećirović, & Dubravac, 2020; Dubravac & Latić, 2019; Laličić & Dubravac, 2021; Ribo & Dubravac, 2021; Brdarević-Čeljo, Ahmetović, & Bajić, 2021), Bosnian students being highly motivated to learn English so that they can easily communicate with English speaking friends, and get a better job in the forthcoming future. While their positive attitude seems to be evident, their needs and preferred ways of leaning English have not been extensively investigated in this learning context.

However, the majority of studies conducted in various EFL contexts have shown that learners while appreciating all language skills, give primacy to oral and aural skills (Ferris & Tagg, 1996 Ferris, 1998; Hyland, 1997). The least valuable and the easiest appears to be reading (Ogric-Kevric & Dubravac, 2017). Speaking is seen as a core language skill, but simultaneously one of the most demanding language skills (Brown, 2015) because it requires not only the knowledge of language but also the ability to discourse (Ogric-Kevric & Dubravac, 2017). Many studies have also suggested that students experience academic writing difficulties, markedly with respect to style, grammar, and cohesion (Abiri, 2013; Evans & Green, 2007). Listening stands out as one of the most neglected language skills (Tzotzou, 2014). Likewise, more pronunciation, vocabulary and spelling building activities should be constituted to please the learners' needs for further practice in related areas (Davies, 2006, cited in Tzotzou, 2014).

With respect to NA a particularly relevant is the analysis of learners' preferred ways of processing information, i.e., the use of language learning strategies. It has been indicated that appropriate learning strategies might contribute to a more effective and enjoyable learning experience (Oxford, 1990). Being aware of their learners' favorite strategies while learning the target language grammar and vocabulary, teachers can adjust their teaching methods and thus ease the learning process (Bećirović, 2017). Overall, it has been revealed that young learners use strategies in a task-specific manner, which are often simple, while older learners make use of generalized strategies, which are more complex and sophisticated (Brown, 1989). Brown and Carter (1986), for instance, perceived that 'rehearsal' for young learners comprised rote repetition, whereas for older learners, it included "active, systematic, and elaborative procedures" (p. 104).

While paying close attention to the balanced development of key language skills and the use of appropriate teaching methods, teachers should always be careful when choosing topics to be discussed within classrooms, as these should be age appropriate if we want learners to enjoy the activities. Generally, favorite topics selected by younger learners are "entertainment and leisure, interpersonal life and social network; and technology in daily life" (Hui-Chen Hsieh, 2016; p. 126); health, sport, and traveling (Tzotzou, 2014). Teachers usually rely on the textbooks, which might be a wrong idea taking into consideration that sometimes the same textbooks are used by a few generations, and do not always follow the current situation. Therefore, a NA might be useful in this respect as well, as it shows whether the topics covered really present those students are the most interested in.

Taking into account the aforementioned, a NA generally leads to a better coordination between teachers and learners in different aspects of the teaching-learning process. Although it is stated that harmony between learners' and teachers' goals considering task assignment and performance must be supported (Block, 1996), they differ greatly from one another (Barkhuizen, 1998). Thus, a NA would offer useful data as to how much students' needs are satisfied within language classrooms.

III. Methodology

A. Research Questions

This study will illustrate the attitudes, needs and learning preferences among Bosnian EFL elementary school students. It attempts to answer four main questions as follows:

1.   What are elementary school learners' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language?

2. What are elementary school learners' language needs/wants?
3. What are learners' preferences concerning ways of learning, learning strategies, and topics?
4. Is there any significant difference in the participants' learning preferences based on different grade levels?

B. Participants

The research sample comprised 200 randomly selected participants attending elementary school. A stratified random sampling approach was utilized, and participants were chosen from different grade levels. Thus, there were 15 (7.5 %) fifth grade students, 66 (33 %) sixth grade students, 45 (22.5%) seventh grade students, 43 (21.5%) eight grade students and 31 (15.5%) ninth grade students. There were 109 (54.5%) female and 91 (45.5%) male students. The age of selected participants ranged from 10 to 15.

C. Instruments and Procedures

After obtaining permission from the schools' administration and participants themselves, the instrument was administrated to the elementary school students. The participants were informed that their answers would be anonymous, trusted, and voluntary, and they were provided with suitable clarification whenever necessary. To complete the items presented in the survey, the participants were kindly asked to read the statements carefully and to select the preferred answer (yes/no/no response), which indicated their beliefs about the given statements. Approximately 20 minutes were needed in order to complete the questionnaire.

Three parts were covered in the survey. The first part of the questionnaire constituted background questions such as gender, age, grade, the average grade in the English language, learning English outside class, and so forth. The next three parts presented the instrument designed and authorized by Brindley (1989), investigating learners' attitudes towards English language learning, their needs/ wants (favorite skills, difficulties, need for further practice), and learning preferences generally with respect to favorite learning activities, preferred ways of learning grammar and vocabulary as well as favorite topics discussed during English classes. In all the parts the participants could opt for one of the possible answers: yes, no, and no answer.

D. Data Analysis

In order to examine the data, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0 was employed. To analyze learners' attitudes towards learning English, their needs, and their preferences regarding the ways of learning, strategies, and topics, frequency statistics were performed. Moreover, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was used to determine whether there is a significant difference in learning preferences based on the variable of different grade levels.

IV. RESULTS

With reference to the learners' attitudes towards English language learning, that is the reason for learning English (see Table 1), it is rather surprising that almost all of them (179/200) are learning English to find a better job when they leave school since they are relatively young to stress this future matter. Also, the majority of them show great interest in communication with foreign people or tourists (176/200), followed by the importance of the English language (170/200) and traveling to other countries (169/200). Moreover, a good number of the participants (131/200) enjoy learning English. It is interesting that only a small number of them (38/200) reported that they do not know the reason for learning English.

TABLE 1
LEARNERS ATTITUDE TOWARDS LANGUAGE LEARNING

Why are you learning English?	Frequency					
	Yes		No		No answer	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
So I can travel to other countries	169	84.5	25	12.5	6	3.0
So I can learn about England	109	54.5	80	40.0	11	5.5
So I can understand English songs	140	70.0	44	22.0	16	8.0
So I can understand English films	146	73.0	43	21.5	11	5.5
So I can understand English	135	73.0	38	21.5	27	5.5
So I can understand books/magazines/newspaper	130	65.0	59	29.5	11	5.5
So I can speak to foreign people/tourists	176	88.0	19	9.5	5	2.5
So I can use the internet better	142	71.0	46	23.0	12	6.0
So I can pass English exams	128	64.0	53	26.5	19	9.5
So I can find a job when I leave school	179	89.5	14	7.0	7	3.5
Because English is an important world language	170	85.0	21	10.5	9	4.5
Because I enjoy learning English	131	65.5	44	22.0	25	12.5
Because my parents want me to learn	70	35.0	111	55.5	19	9.5
I don't know why I am learning	38	19.0	135	67.5	27	13.5

As shown in Table 2, the participants' least favorite language skills are writing (134/200), followed by reading (150/200), while they enjoy learning to speak (180/200) and to listen (180/200) in English.

TABLE 2
FAVORITE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Do you like	Frequency					
	Yes		No		No answer	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reading?	150	75.0	30	15.0	20	10.0
Speaking?	180	90.0	11	5.5	09	4.5
Writing?	134	67.0	47	23.5	19	9.5
Listening?	180	90.0	14	7.0	6	3.0

Table 3 reveals that learners would like to practice speaking (168/200), pronunciation (168/200), and spelling (156/200) the most. On the other hand, they show the least interest in practicing writing (134/200) and listening (134/200).

TABLE 3
NEED FOR FURTHER PRACTICE

I would like to practice more in:	Frequency					
	Yes		No		No answer	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reading	138	69.0	48	24.0	14	7.0
Speaking	168	84.0	23	11.5	09	4.5
Writing	134	67.0	53	26.5	13	6.5
Listening	134	67.0	48	24.0	18	9.0
Vocabulary	136	68.0	41	20.5	23	11.5
Grammar	144	72.0	40	20.0	16	8.0
Spelling	156	78.0	34	17.0	10	5.0
Pronunciation	168	84.0	25	12.5	7	3.5

Considering learning preferences, including the ways of learning (Table 4), the overwhelming majority of the participants (172/200) like to learn by reading texts or stories; what is more, they revealed that discussions in the classroom are their least favorite way of learning (93/200). Other popular ways of learning are: doing oral exercise/practice (159/200); using the internet (157/200); doing homework (153/200), doing written exercises/practice (151/200). Concerning models of work, the participants would rather work in groups (142/200) than in pairs (133/200), as a whole class (133/200) or alone (117/200). Interestingly, more than 50% of the participants answered that they like to learn by studying grammar rules (133/200), while many (98/200) do not actually like listening to the CDs.

TABLE 4
WAYS OF LEARNING

How do you like to learn?	Frequency					
	Yes		No		No answer	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Studying grammar rules	133	66.5	46	23.0	21	10.5
Doing written exercises/practice	151	75.5	37	18.5	12	6.0
Writing short passages	99	49.5	78	39.0	23	11.5
Reading texts/stories	172	86.0	22	11.0	6	3.0
Listening to CDs	98	49.0	88	44.0	14	7.0
Watching videos	149	74.5	41	20.5	10	5.0
Doing oral exercises/practice	159	79.5	29	14.5	12	6.0
Discussing in the classroom	93	46.5	77	38.5	30	15.0
Doing projects	132	66.0	58	29.0	10	5.0
Doing homework	153	76.5	37	18.5	10	5.0
Reading aloud in class	127	63.5	61	30.5	12	6.0
Working alone	117	58.5	70	35.0	13	6.5
Working in pairs	133	66.5	55	27.5	12	6.0
Working in groups	142	71.0	47	23.5	11	5.5
Working as a whole class	133	66.5	56	28.0	11	5.5
Using computers	136	68.0	52	26.0	12	6.0
Using the internet	157	78.5	33	16.5	10	5.0
Playing games	108	54.0	80	40.0	12	6.0

As far as learning strategies are accountable, the majority learn vocabulary by translating new words (174/20) and by hearing new words (173/200). It seems that the least favorite way of vocabulary learning is by copying new words (81/200) (Fig. 1)
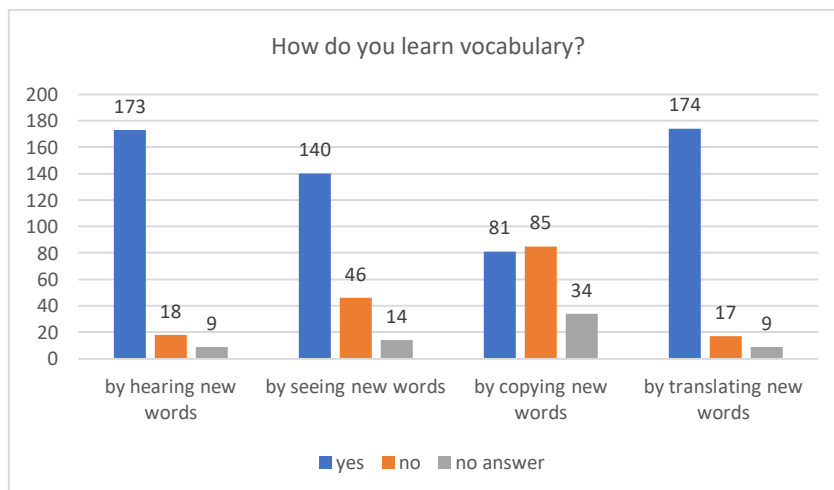
Figure 1. Learning Strategies-Vocabulary Learning

As can be seen in Fig. 2, the participants prefer learning grammar by doing written exercises at school (160/200), followed by oral practice in class (149/200). The next most favorite method is studying grammar rules (143/200), whereas they are the least interested in learning doing written exercise at home (118/200).
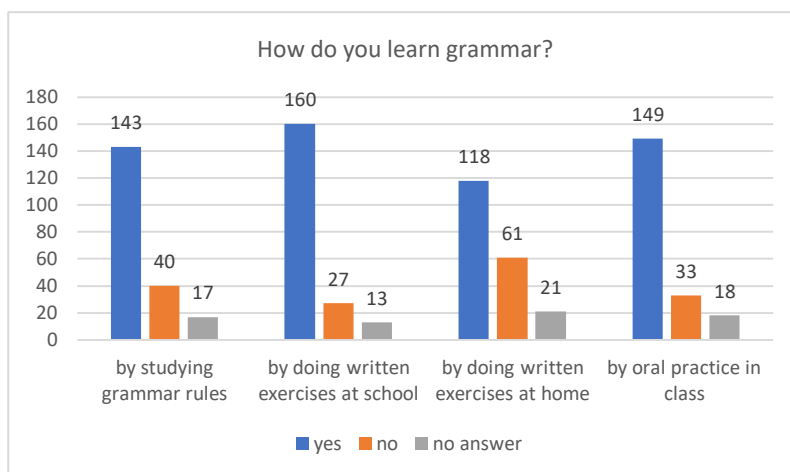

Figure 2. Learning Strategies- Grammar Learning

As illustrated in Table 5, the participants' most favorite topic is traveling (174/200), followed by family/friends/people/relationships (168/200), free time/hobbies (168/200), sports (166), other topics that are not mentioned (163/200), entertainment (156/200). However, the least attention is paid to topics such as advertising/shopping (90/200), geography (103/200) and festivals /celebrations (119/200).

TABLE 5
FAVORITE TOPICS

What are your favorite topics?	Frequency					
	Yes		No		No answer	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Culture / Habits	117	58.5	70	35.0	13	6.5
Geography	103	51.5	84	42.0	13	6.5
Advertising / Shopping	90	45.0	97	48.5	13	6.5
Food / Diet / Cooking	127	63.5	61	30.5	12	6.0
Technology	137	68.5	54	27.0	9	4.5
Environment/Nature	151	75.5	40	20.0	9	4.5
Music	148	74.0	35	17.5	17	8.5
Family/Friends/People/Relationships	168	84.0	25	12.5	7	3.5
Free time/ Hobbies	168	84.0	23	11.5	9	4.5
Traveling	174	87.0	20	10.0	6	3.0
Jobs	125	62.5	61	30.5	14	7.0
Health	152	76.0	40	20.0	8	4.0
Famous people / Celebrities	132	66.0	54	27.0	14	7.0
Drama/Cinema	105	52.5	82	41.0	13	6.5
Entertainment	156	78.0	36	18.0	8	4.0
Internet	149	74.5	43	21.5	8	4.0
Literature/Stories	118	59.0	72	36.0	10	5.0
Sports	166	83.0	29	14.5	5	2.5
Art/Painting	111	55.5	75	37.5	14	7.0
Science	122	61.0	68	34.0	10	5.0
Festivals / Celebrations	119	59.5	63	31.5	18	9.0
Other topics you like?	163	81.5	28	14.0	9	4.5

Furthermore, the differences in favorite topics based on grade level, including grades from the 5th to the 9th grade were analyzed (Table 6). The outcomes revealed that the most favorite topic in the 5th grade is music (14/15), followed by traveling, entertainment, and sports, all of which were rated the same (13/15). However, the slightest interest they showed for learning about drama/cinema (5/15). In grade 6' the most significant attention is paid to topics related to family/friends/people/relationship (60/66), next was travelling (59/66), followed by sports and free time/hobbies (54/66). In contrast, the least attention is paid to advertising/shopping (27/66). The situation is not much different in the 7th grade as travelling (40/45), free time/hobbies (38/45), sports (38/45) come to the fore; however, they do not enjoy learning about culture/habits (22/43). When it comes to the 8th grade, the participants gave priority to topics associated with internet/ family/friends/people/relationship and travelling (37/43), whereas the most useless they found advertising/shopping (16/43). In grade 9 the most preferable topic was free time/hobbies (29/31), next were entertainment, Internet (27/31), while festival/celebrities and geography (16/31) were the least favorite.

TABLE 6
FAVORITE TOPICS BASED ON GRADE LEVELS

What are your favorite topics?	Frequency														
	5th			6th			7th			8th			9th		
	Yes	No	No Ans.	Yes	No	No Ans.	Yes	No	No Ans.	Yes	No	No Ans.	Yes	No	No Ans.
Culture / Habits	11	4	0	38	23	5	22	21	2	26	14	3	20	8	3
Geography	6	8	1	36	26	4	25	17	3	20	21	2	16	12	3
Advertising / Shopping	9	6	0	27	33	6	18	24	3	16	24	3	20	10	1
Food / Diet / Cooking	11	4	0	44	16	6	23	20	2	26	15	2	23	6	2
Technology	10	5	0	48	15	3	27	16	2	34	7	2	18	11	2
Environment/Nature	11	4	0	53	9	4	34	9	2	31	10	2	22	8	1
Music	14	0	1	46	10	10	31	12	2	34	7	2	23	6	2
Family/Friends/People/Relationships	12	2	1	60	4	2	34	10	1	37	5	1	25	4	2
Free time/ Hobbies	12	2	1	54	7	5	38	6	1	35	7	1	29	1	1
Traveling	13	2	0	59	5	2	40	3	2	37	4	2	25	6	0
Jobs	11	3	1	37	21	8	26	17	2	33	9	1	18	11	2
Health	11	3	1	53	10	3	33	10	2	34	8	1	21	9	1
Famous people / Celebrities	8	7	0	43	17	6	28	14	3	33	7	3	20	9	2
Drama/Cinema	5	9	1	38	23	5	26	18	1	19	20	4	17	12	2
Entertainment	13	2	0	51	11	4	34	9	2	31	10	2	27	4	0
Internet	12	3	0	42	22	2	31	10	4	37	5	1	27	3	1
Literature/Stories	9	5	1	44	17	5	25	18	2	22	20	1	18	12	1
Sports	13	2	0	54	10	2	38	5	2	36	6	1	25	6	0
Art/Painting	7	7	1	43	19	4	24	17	4	19	20	4	18	12	1
Science	8	7	0	44	19	3	27	16	2	24	15	4	19	11	1
Festivals / Celebrations	6	8	1	42	18	6	30	12	3	25	13	5	16	12	3
Other topics you like?	13	2	0	55	7	4	37	6	2	34	7	2	24	6	1

A Chi-Square test was conducted to find out the significant differences in the ways of learning based on grade level, the independent variable grade level including five groups (5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th) and the mixed dependent variables of preference of ways of learning comprising all the aforementioned ways of learning. The chi-square test outcomes revealed that the grade level had a significant influence on a few variables. The analysis of variance on each dependent variable indicated that the grade level had a significant influence on learning by studying grammar rules (p = .020), doing homework (p = .004); by using computers (p = .003), and playing games (p = .003), while on the other variables there was no significant difference.

TABLE 7
DIFFERENCES IN THE WAYS OF LEARNING BASED ON GRADE LEVELS

How do you like to learn?	5th			6th			7th			8th			9th			X^2	p	Effect size
	Yes	No	No An s.	Yes	No	No an s.	Ye s	No	No an s.	Ye s	No	No an s.	Y es	No	No ans.			
Studying grammar rules	10	3	2	51	9	6	35	9	1	21	16	6	16	9	6	18.06	.020	.300
Doing written exercises/practice	12	2	1	57	7	2	36	7	2	26	12	5	20	9	2	12.98	.112	.255
Writing short passages	9	5	1	32	26	8	23	18	4	18	18	7	17	11	3	2.92	.939	.121
Reading texts/stories	13	2	0	59	6	1	38	5	2	34	7	2	28	2	1	4.02	.855	.142
Listening to CDs	7	8	0	34	27	5	20	22	3	20	19	4	17	12	2	2.87	.942	.120
Watching videos	11	4	0	45	19	2	35	8	2	32	7	4	26	3	2	8.60	.377	.207
Doing oral exercises/practice	13	2	0	56	5	5	32	10	3	34	6	3	24	6	1	6.98	.538	.187
Discussing in the classroom	9	5	1	29	25	12	20	22	3	20	15	8	15	10	6	6.56	.584	.181
Doing projects	10	5	0	41	21	4	34	9	2	25	15	3	22	8	1	4.91	.767	.157
Doing homework	11	4	0	59	5	2	36	5	4	31	10	2	16	13	2	22.76	.004	.337
Reading aloud in class	10	4	1	40	22	4	32	11	2	24	17	2	21	7	3	4.61	.799	.152
Working alone	9	5	1	45	17	4	29	14	2	17	22	4	17	12	2	10.03	.263	.224
Working in pairs	10	4	1	43	20	3	30	14	1	31	9	3	19	8	4	5.31	.725	.163
Working in groups	9	5	1	50	14	2	30	13	2	35	6	2	18	9	4	9.37	.312	.216
Working as a whole class	8	7	0	43	20	3	30	12	3	32	8	3	20	9	2	5.49	.704	.166
Using computers	6	9	0	38	19	9	33	10	2	34	8	1	25	6	0	23.34	.003	.342
Using the internet	12	3	0	43	16	7	36	7	2	37	5	1	29	2	0	14.86	.062	.273
Playing games	9	6	0	25	34	7	20	22	3	33	8	2	21	10	0	22.96	.003	.339

V. DISCUSSION

With respect to the learners' attitudes towards English learning, the frequency statistics results revealed differences in the reasons for learning English, with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1998) being present. Despite being young, learning English to find a better job when they leave school was the most common answer, meaning that they are mainly extrinsically motivated. These findings on behalf of peers are in line with the study conducted by Ahmetović, Bećirović, and Dubravac (2020), whose results also discovered that learners in Central Bosnia were mostly extrinsically motivated to learn English. Although students experience extrinsic motivation, the fact that they enjoy learning English is also evident since a good number of the participants find English enjoyable, which might be an indicator of their intrinsic motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Such positive attitudes towards learning English might be supported by previously done research in this context (Ahmetović, Bećirović, & Dubravac, 2020; Bećirović, 2017; Dubravac & Latić, 2019), but this also seems to be the characteristic of EFL learners worldwide (Dwaik & Shehadeh, 2010; Saheb, 2014). In general, extrinsic motivation (e.g., learning to pass an exam, to find a better job) may hinder learning (Lightbow & Spada, 1993) in the long run, and that is why it should be minimized by enhancing learners' intrinsic motivation. Additionally, as intrinsic motivation is of great importance for learning (Dörnyei, 1998) and benefits learners in both the short and long term, teachers should attempt to stimulate it by reviewing the present curriculum and materials used in the EFL classroom, as meeting learners' needs might be a key to their enjoyment in the classes, which directly leads to intrinsic motivation development.

When it comes to language skills, the findings showed that the learners want to practice writing the least and it is not their preferable skill, so they encounter the most difficulties in writing. This study is in line with the study by Ogric-Kevric and Dubravac (2017), who also found that learners in this learning EFL context, at least in public school, addressed writing along with speaking as the most challenging skill. Such results are somehow expected since writing is generally found to be one of the most troublesome skills (Abiri, 2013; Evans & Green, 2007), and even if learners have remarkable progress in the English learning process, on the whole, writing skills still will be the weakest area in

learning. Showing less interest in reading might be due to the fact that these two skills are interrelated; thus, learners who are deficient in reading also illustrate weak writing abilities and vice-versa (Loban, 1963). Thus, the writing position should be thoroughly investigated and carefully evaluated to make the needed adjustments or enhancements which will balance any weaknesses in writing and sooner or later help learners overcome their challenges as successfully as possible.

On the other hand, they found pleasure in doing speaking and listening activities, though they are not interested in practicing listening as in speaking. The finding might be related to the fact that the majority of language learners want to master speaking skills as quickly as possible, since nowadays "someone's fluency in speaking measures his/her proficiency in that language" (Martin, 2011, p. 237). These findings are in line with a vast number of studies that found that aural and oral skills are learner's priorities (e.g., Ferris & Tagg, 1996; Ferris, 1998; Hyland, 1997). However, although learners prefer one skill over the other to make a balance between them is essential if one wants to succeed in learning. Consequently, learners should be taught all language skills, but the ones they have difficulties with should be at the fore.

When it comes to learning preferences, it is interesting to mention that they like to learn by reading texts or stories, doing oral exercises/practice, using the internet, doing homework, doing written exercises/practice. Noteworthy is that learners reported that their least preferred way is learning by discussion in the classroom, which is somehow surprising since discussion, as one of the active ways of learning, leads to better long-term learning outcomes (Freeman et al., 2014). In spite of not being introverts, students might still find it difficult to deal with learners' social anxiety over the thought of having to communicate in front of the class. Considering models of work, teachers should verify whether the classroom material encourages collaborative learning because the majority of the participants appreciate working in groups or as a whole class.

With respect to the preferred use of vocabulary learning strategies, it is found that the majority of the participants learn by translating new words. Regardless of having different rules in language teaching, most teachers agree that translation is a dominant tool to help learners comprehend foreign words and convey ideas in the target language (Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1994). Tankosić and Dubravac (2016) also showed that translation tasks are very common test tasks in this EFL learning context. Although there is no harm in using translation strategies, it is regarded as a poor learning strategy in the value of the communicative language method when the most efficient way for learners is to think in the target language (Husain, 1995). The fact that the participants preferred this way of learning might not be surprising at all, as they are very young and not proficient in the target language. On the other hand, while learning grammar, they prefer doing written exercises at school over the other strategies. In this case, teachers help learners fill voids in their structural use of foreign language grammar, whereas this is not possible while doing grammar exercises at home. However, over time they are expected to become more independent language learners.

As far as their favorite topics are concerned, the frequency analysis showed that their favorite topics are traveling, family/friends/people/relationships, free time/hobbies, sports. In general, the preferable topic is traveling, yet when all learners' books (from the 5th to the 9th grade) are considered none of them offer this topic, though in most of the books, topics related with places and cultures are offered. The next topic linked to the relationship with family/friends/people is mentioned in all the books, whereas free time/hobbies and sports are learned mostly by older peers in the grade 8 and 9. Interestingly, the least attention is paid to topics such as advertising/shopping; geography, and festivals /celebrations, that are also not or are scarcely specified in some of books. Although books provide students with many different topics, still their needs are quite different. For example, in the 5th-grade music is the most favorite topic though it is mentioned only indirectly through listening to songs. Their other favorite topics (travelling, entertainment, sports) are not or are rarely discussed in the book *Dip in 5* (Kavazović, Vasić & Mardešić, 2008) they follow. The situation is neither different in the 6th and 7th grade as their favorite topic is traveling, which is not discussed in the book *Dip in 6* (Vasić, Kazazović, Ban, & Blažić, 2009) nor in *Way to go 7* (Vasić & Breka, 2010). The students' needs are not fulfilled even in higher grades; thus, in the 8th grade, sport and traveling as favorite topics are not considered in the book *Way to go 8* (Vasić, Breka & Mardešić, 2011) though the situation is a bit different in the 9th-grade, where the topics of sport and free time as preferred ones are debated in the students' book *Challenges* (Harris, Mower, Sikorzynska & Mešić, 2012)[1]. Generally, teachers should pay more attention to the chosen material, particularly in lower grades, since their books are more than a decade old. That being the case, it is not surprising that their needs are not matched with the books they follow. In order to engage learners physically, intellectually, socially, and enthusiastically in learning English (Vincent, 1984), teachers must enhance the cross-thematic component of the curriculum while taking into account their favorite topics.

To answer the last research question, we investigated the influence of grade levels on the differences in learning preference. The results highlighted that a grade level has a significant influence on several variables, namely learning by studying grammar rules, by doing homework, by using computers, and by playing games, whereas other ways of learning do not have significant influence. Generally, higher grade students show significantly higher scores in their preference for learning by grammar rules and doing homework, whereas learning by using a computer and playing games was significantly greater in the lower grades. The obtained results might be due to the fact that older learners,

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[1] The aforementioned textbooks are those which our participants follow in their schools. It does not necessarily mean that they are used in other schools in the country.

being aware of English importance itself, see studying as a serious matter because they prefer studying grammar and doing homework, rather than learning it by playing games or using computers, which is the case with younger learners. These findings are in accordance with the statement that the preference in learning style transforms with experience and age (Kolb & Kolb, 2013).

VI. CONCLUSION

The examination of the participants' responses recorded that extrinsic motivation for learning English is the greatest, but that they do not lack intrinsic motivation either. Led by present results, teachers can put into practice various strategies with the aim of motivating learners in an attempt to increase results in EFL learning significantly. Trying to achieve this, teachers should find appropriate measures to provoke learners' curiosity and foster learners' interest in learning English.

In order to facilitate learning in general, on the one hand, teachers should accommodate their teaching process and incorporate in curriculum learning activities that are most appropriate for their learners' learning preferences, and on the other, being aware of the importance of some not so preferred ways of learning, they should make them more attractive to their learners. Thus, while promoting group and pair work, teachers should help learners see the benefits of discussion, writing activities, varied strategies used for grammar and vocabulary acquisition. Using a combination of methods has to be put into practice in order to make learning achievable; thus, employing a diverse set of activities and materials which will suit distinctive learning preferences will be of great importance.

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