



NACIONALNI CENTAR ZA VANJSKO  
VREDNOVANJE OBRAZOVANJA



# Summary of Results from the ESLC Conducted in the Republic of Croatia

Zagreb, June 2012

# Institutional Profile

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## Abbreviations

ESLC	European Survey on Language Competences
EU	European Union
CNES	Croatian National Educational Standard
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
NCVVO	National Centre for External Evaluation of Education
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

## Acknowledgements

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# 1. Organisation of primary education in Croatia

Considering the fact that the students sampled in the ESLC were tested at ISCED2, which corresponds to the eighth grade of primary school in Croatia, we include here a short overview of the organisation of primary education in Croatia.

In Croatia, primary school represents the compulsory level of education whose function is to ensure that students gain a broad education.

Eight-year primary education in Croatia is compulsory and free for all children from the ages of six to fifteen. Children must be six years old by the end of March to begin school the following September. Even though the official policy is that students can begin school in the year when they turn six, children typically begin primary school at the age of seven because their parents feel they will benefit from being more mature.

Primary education consists of three segments:

1. compulsory primary education conducted in regular primary schools and special institutions for students with developmental difficulties;
2. arts education conducted in primary music and dance schools;
3. primary education of adults conducted in regular schools and specialised institutions.

Primary music education is also conducted in certain regular primary schools as a separate educational programme.

The last year of primary school (eighth grade) corresponds to ISCED2, while ISCED1 corresponds to the last year of the first cycle of primary school (fourth grade).

Foreign language teaching starts in the first grade of primary education. This has been legally regulated since 1 August 2003. Learning one foreign language is compulsory for all students from the first grade. In the fourth grade, students have the opportunity to choose a second foreign language as an optional subject. In the first year of ISCED2, students of a few primary schools in Croatia have the possibility of learning ancient languages: Latin in grades five to eight, and Greek in grades seven to eight.

However, in just a few schools students have the option of learning a second foreign language from the first grade. This depends on school capacities. Students are not officially assessed, i.e. they do not get marks, before the fourth grade, when foreign languages are offered as an optional subject.

## 2. Organisation of foreign language teaching in primary schools

Students at ISCED1 have two first foreign language lessons per week, i.e. at least 70 lessons per year. One lesson lasts 45 minutes. As for students in ISCED2, they have three first foreign language lessons per week, or at least 105 lessons per year.

Two lessons a week are devoted to teaching the second foreign language, which amounts to at least 70 lessons for optional foreign language teaching. In the ESLC Report, teaching time is calculated as 60-minute periods and the values are rounded to the nearest integer. According to this calculation, students in Croatian schools have two first foreign language lessons and two second foreign language lessons per week.

In addition to having the possibility of choosing a foreign language as an optional subject, students in Croatia can participate in extra foreign language lessons (both enrichment and remedial lessons).

Foreign language teachers at ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 levels in primary schools must complete a university degree programme in the particular language they teach, i.e. they are required to obtain a diploma at the minimum level of ISCED 5B. The majority of foreign language teachers have completed a university degree programme at ISCED 5A. Professional development is compulsory for all direct participants in the schools' educational activities, therefore also for foreign language teachers.

Foreign language lessons are usually conducted in complete classes, i.e. with all students present. According to the pedagogical standard, there cannot be more than 30 students in one class.

### **3. Samples used in the ESLC and the proportion of students who learn foreign languages in primary school**

ESLC testing was conducted in primary schools on a representative sample of eighth grade students at ISCED level 2. Student sampling was done by SurveyLang experts on the basis of the list of all Croatian eighth graders currently learning foreign languages.

Stratification was based on school size and six regions. Most students in Croatian schools learn English as their first foreign language and German as their second foreign language. According to the 2005 Eurobarometer survey on languages of the EU, 43% of Croatian respondents reported that they mostly speak English, 33% said the same for German, and 12% for Italian.

According to the data from the Croatia bureau of statistics, in the school year 2009/2010 there was 481,270 students enrolled in primary schools. In Table 1 there are summarized data for the students' enrolment of learning foreign languages.

**Table 1. Pupils in primary schools learning foreign languages by grades**

	Pupils total	Pupils by grades							
		I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	VI.	VII.	VIII.
Total	481 270	39 689	41 767	44 167	70 019	71 436	73 311	73 108	67 773
English	336 294 %	34 962 88,1	32 226 77,2	37 595 85,1	42 506 60,7	45 257 63,4	46 983 64,1	48 242 65,9	44 523 65,7
French	3 434 %	75 0,2	55 0,1	66 0,1	754 1,1	607 0,8	739 1	593 0,8	545 0,8
German	112 891 %	4 282 10,8	4 234 10,1	5 040 11,4	20 987 29,9	20 144 28,2	20 355 27,8	19 498 26,7	18 351 27,1
Italian	27 395 %	234 0,6	1 107 2,7	1 318 3	5 587 7,9	5 269 7,4	5 071 6,9	4 622 6,3	4 187 6,2
Spanish	174 %	- -	- -	- -	25 0,0	39 0,0	52 0,0	32 0,0	26 0,0

## **4. Administration of the main survey in the school year 2010/2011**

The main survey was conducted during the school year 2010/2011, from 1 March until 28 March, in 144 sampled schools. English was tested in 68 schools, while German was tested in 69 schools. Since both languages were tested in seven schools, there were 151 successfully administered testings, and the total number of students was 3,342.

According to Croatian law, written parental consent is needed for the participation of underage children in surveys. In 0.3% of cases, parents did not give consent, while 0.36% of students were unable to participate in the survey for justified reasons. Only 0.06% of students declined to participate in the survey. The main survey sample included 3,625 students with a response rate of 92.2%. This confirms that students in Croatian primary schools are still not overwhelmed by testings and that they are motivated to participate in surveys.

All schools had the option of choosing paper-based or computer-based testing. In total, 2,866 (79%) students were sampled for paper-based testing, and 759 (21%) students were sampled for computer-based testing. Just under one third of the schools applied for computer-based testing; the main reason for this lower rate is the schools' lack of technical equipment.

The Teacher and Principal Questionnaires were completed by 76% of teachers and 82% of principals. In comparison with other participating adjudicated entities, this is a very high response rate.

During the administration of tests, a help desk was organised for possible queries from school coordinators, test administrators and schools' computer technicians.

## **5. Results by years of learning the foreign language and achievement**

Since 2003, students in Croatia have started to learn their first foreign language from the first grade, and until the fourth grade they have two first foreign language lessons per week. From the fifth grade onwards, students have three first foreign language lessons per week. This means that the total number of first foreign language lessons at ISCED1 and ISCED2 levels is 700.

For the time being, a second foreign language is an optional subject. Students have two second foreign language lessons per week from the fourth or fifth grade until the eighth grade. Therefore, the maximum number of foreign languages lessons is 350. According to CNES, the Syllabus for Primary Education and CEFR, it is estimated that students who finish ISCED1 (grades one to four) can achieve A1 in the first foreign language, and that students who finish ISCED2 can achieve A2.

Second foreign language students, who start to learn foreign languages in the fourth grade, are able to achieve the A1+ level, i.e. higher than the preparatory level. This means that students achieve a level higher than A1 in language skills, but they do not achieve A2 due to the limited number of lessons, except in rare cases.

When determining the language competences of each student, we have to bear in mind that they do not necessarily have the same level of competence in all language skills. A student may possess more fully developed receptive language skills than productive language skills; however, this depends on their individual interests and affinities, living environment, language teaching conditions and other factors. Therefore, students may achieve A1 in the area of productive skills after the fourth grade, or they may achieve A2 in the area of comprehension even before finishing the eighth grade.

## 5.1. Comparison of results in English, the first target language, and German, the second target language

During the administration of the ESLC, a total of 1,109 (49.6%) students were tested in English, and 1,126 (50.4%) students were tested in the second target language, German.

**Figure 1: Comparison of results in Reading for the first and second target language**

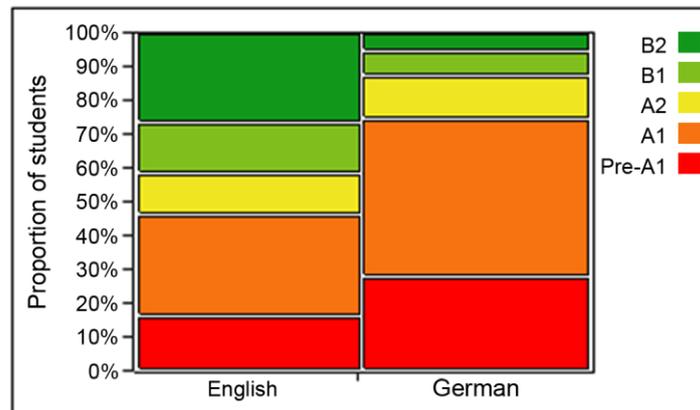
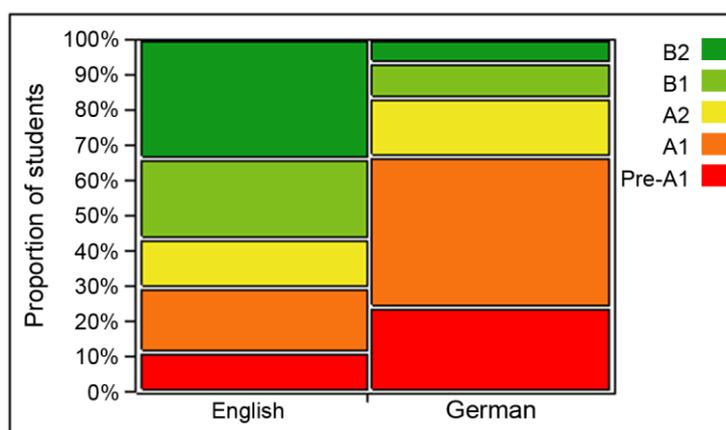


Figure 1 shows that students tested in the first target language generally achieve good results in Reading, which was expected. Level A2 and higher, which is considered to be attainable after eight years of foreign language learning, is achieved by 54% of students. However, 46% of students do not achieve the expected level in first target language Reading. Second target language achievements show that 72% of students achieve level A1 and higher in Reading, and that only 28% of students are below the expected minimum level of proficiency.

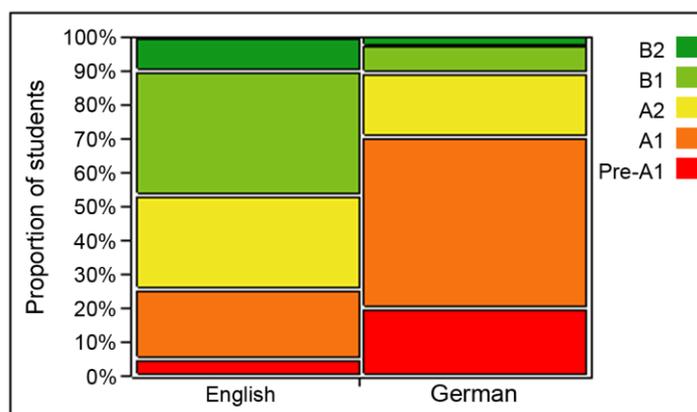
**Figure 2: Comparison of results in Listening for the first and second target language**



When comparing achievements in Listening, the results for the first target language show that 71% of students achieve level A2 and higher, 14% achieve A2, 22% achieve B1 and 34% achieve B2. A total of 30% students do not achieve the minimum level – 12% are still at pre-A1 and 18% are at A1.

The results in second target language Listening show that 76% of students achieve A1 and higher, while expectations were not met by 24% of students.

**Figure 3: Comparison of results in Writing for the first and second target language**



Since Writing tasks examine higher cognitive processes and active language proficiency, we can expect students to score lower on Writing tasks than on Listening and Reading tasks.

In first target language Writing, 75% of students reached A2 and higher: 28% achieve A2, 37% achieve B1, and 10% achieve B2. Twenty-five percent of students score below the expected minimum level, out of which 5% achieve pre-A1. Results for second target language Writing show that only 13% of students do not achieve A1 and

higher. Thirty-five percent of students achieve A1, 24% of students achieve A2, while 28% of students achieve B1 and higher.

**Figure 4: Percentage of Croatian students achieving CEFR levels in the first and second target language, in relation to the mean of other adjudicated entities (EU mean)**

		First target language			Second target language		
Level	HRV/EU	Reading	Listening	Writing	Reading	Listening	Writing
B2	HRV mean	26	34	10	5	6	2
	EU mean	28	32	14	16	15	6
B1	HRV mean	15	22	37	7	10	8
	EU mean	14	16	29	12	14	17
A2	HRV mean	13	14	28	13	17	19
	EU mean	12	13	24	14	16	22
A1	HRV mean	30	18	20	47	43	50
	EU mean	32	23	24	40	35	35
Pre-A1	HRV mean	16	12	5	28	24	20
	EU mean	14	16	9	18	20	20

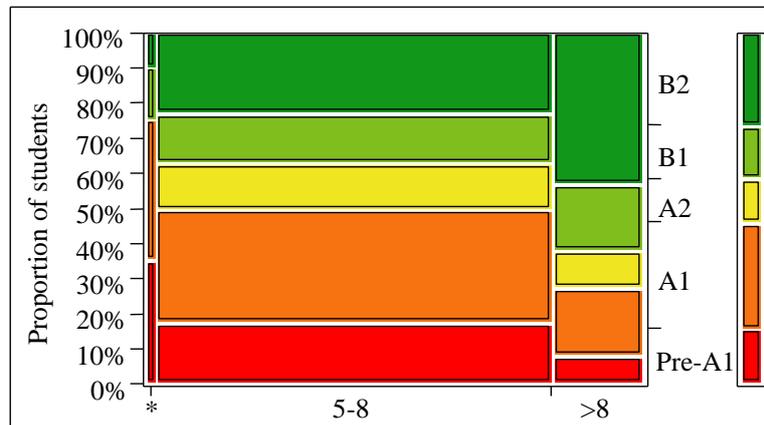
The above comparison shows that the largest negative deviations are visible in the second target language, particularly at A1, B1 and B2. The results of Croatian students in the first target language are similar to those of students in other adjudicated entities. Possible differences arise in the results for Writing, where the largest positive deviation is visible at B1 – the mean of Croatian students is 37, while the mean of students in other adjudicated entities is 29.

## 5.2 Relation between years of learning the foreign language and the CEFR level achieved

### 5.2.1 First target language: Results

As shown in the mosaic diagrams, there is a link between the number of years spent learning the first target language and the students' test performance. The majority of participating students (80%) had been learning English for five to eight years, while approximately 18% of students had been learning the first target language since kindergarten. Therefore, those students had been learning the first target language for more than eight years.

**Figure 5: Results in first target language Reading by number of years learning**

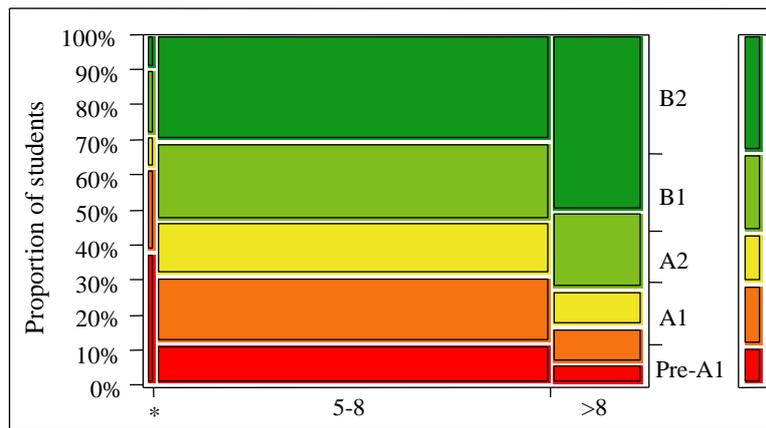


\* 4 - 5 years of learning

The diagram shows that the aforementioned 18% of students possibly achieve better results in Reading. In total, 43% of students achieve B2, 19% achieve B1, 11% achieve A2 and 28% of students do not achieve A2.

Eighty percent of students had been learning the first target language for five to eight years, but 50% of them do not reach A2. Seventeen percent of students do not achieve A1, while 32% of them are at A1. Therefore, 50% of students achieve A2 and higher: 13% achieve A2, 14% achieve B1 and 23% achieve B2.

**Figure 6: Results in first target language Listening by number of years learning**



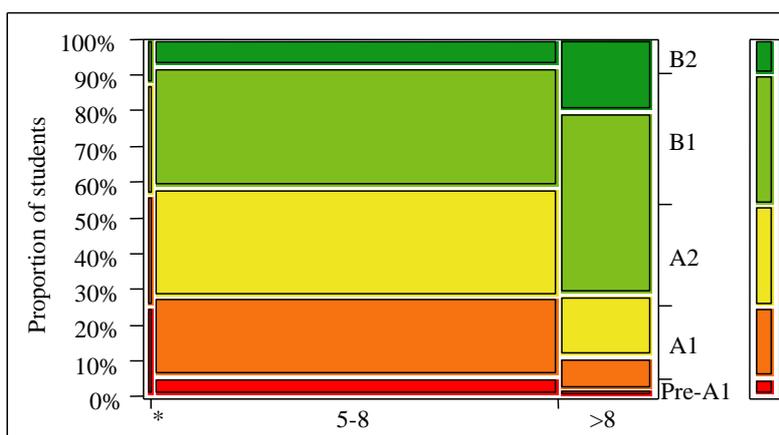
\* 4 - 5 years of learning

Figure 6 shows the results in Listening by years of learning. The results indicate that students who started learning the foreign language at an early age are possibly more successful at Listening. In total, 51% of students achieve B2, 22% achieve B1, 11% achieve A2 and 17% do not achieve A2.

Eighty percent of students had been learning the first target language for five to eight years, but 31% of them do not reach A2. Nineteen percent of students achieve A1 and 16% achieve A2. In total, 69% of students achieve A2 or higher: 15% are at A2, 23% are at B1 and 31% are at B2.

If we compare the achievements of students who had been learning English since kindergarten with the achievements of students who started learning English in primary school, the biggest difference is visible at pre-A1 level, where the number of students who started learning English at an early age is two times smaller than the number of students who started learning their first foreign language in primary school. Furthermore, we can point out the difference between the two categories of students at B2: approximately 20% of students who started learning English at an early age achieve this level.

**Figure 7: Results in first target language Writing by number of years learning**



\* 4 - 5 years of learning

Writing tasks require the use of higher cognitive levels where students demonstrate active foreign language proficiency. As expected, the results are somewhat lower than the results in Reading and Listening. As in previous analyses, here we also see that students who started learning foreign languages at an early age are more successful at all levels of Writing.

Regarding the other skills, in the category of students learning foreign languages since the first grade of primary school, we note that the number of students at pre-A1 and B2 levels is lower and they are more evenly distributed in the remaining three categories. Twenty-three percent of students achieve A1, 31% achieve A2 and 34% achieve B1.

If we take a look at the results of the students who had been learning foreign languages for more than eight years, 88% of them achieve A2 and higher. Only 5% of students are at pre-A1 and 20% are at A1.

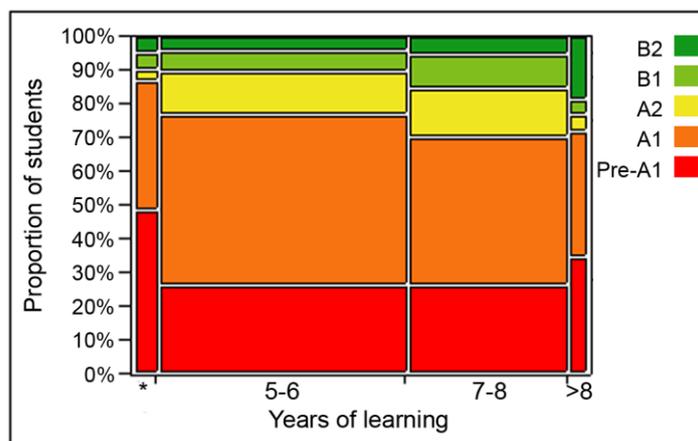
## 5.2.2 Second target language: Results

The results of students tested in the second target language, German, are shown in a similar fashion as the results of students tested in English. However, since German is the second target language, we can expect a different clustering of students by years of learning.

In Figure 9, the first column shows the number of students who had been learning German for one to four years: 62 or 5.5%. The second column shows the group of students who had been learning the second target language from five to six years. This is the largest category, consisting of 617 (55%) students. In the third column, we can see the number of students who had been learning the target language from seven to eight years: 399, or 35.6%. The fourth and last column shows the number of students who had been learning German for more than eight years: 43, or 3.9%.

Considering the distribution of students mentioned above, we shall discuss only the results of the second category of students, those who had been learning the second target language from five to six years, and the results of the third category of students, those who had been learning the second target language from seven to eight years.

**Figure 8: Results in second target language Reading by number of years learning**



\* 4 - 5 years of learning

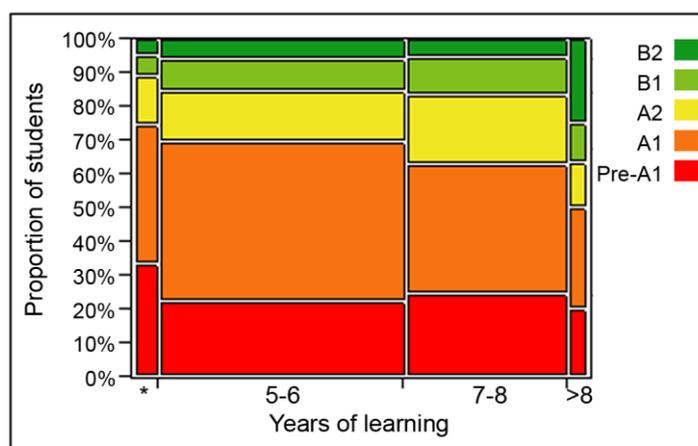
In the first category of students, 74% achieve A1 and higher in German Reading, while 50.6% of students achieve A1. The proportion of students who do not achieve the targeted level is 26% and refers to pre-A1, while 13% of students achieve A2. There is only a small proportion of students who demonstrate a high level of proficiency: 6% achieve B1 and 4% achieve B2.

In the second, somewhat smaller, category of students, 74% achieve level A or higher; 44% achieve A1, 15% achieve A2, 10% achieve B1 and 5% achieve B2. Just as in the previous category of students, 26% of students are at the level of pre-A1.

According to the results shown above, there are no potential differences in Reading achievement between students who had been learning the second target language for five to six years and those who had been learning it for two years longer.

If the sample was larger, we would probably be able to define the potential differences more clearly. Perhaps the cause of the similarity in achievement is the fact that the difference in years of learning the foreign language is too small to be significant according to the statistical method used in the analysis.

**Figure 9: Results in second target language Listening by number of years learning**



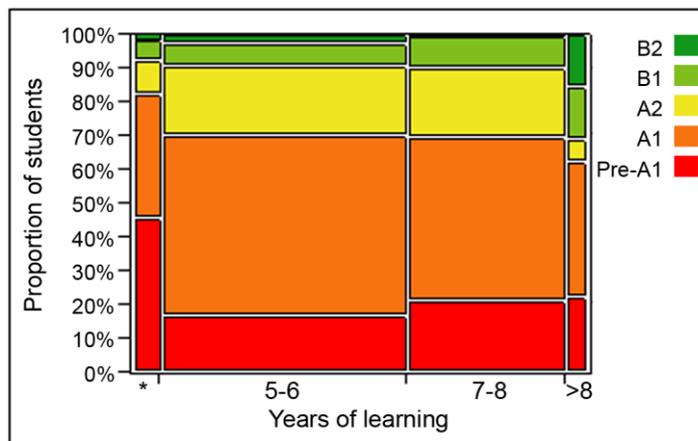
\* 4 – 5 years of learning

Figure 9 shows the results in second target language Listening. In the first category of students, 77% are at A1 or higher, while 47.4% are at A1. The proportion of students who do not achieve the targeted level is 22.6% and refers to pre-A1, while 14.6% of students achieve A2. There is only a small proportion of students who demonstrate a high level of proficiency: 9.8% achieve B1 and 5.6% achieve B2.

In the second, somewhat smaller, category of students, 75% achieve level A or higher. Thirty eight percent of students are at A1, 20% are at A2, 11% are at B1, 5% are at B2 and 25% are at pre-A1.

Almost no differences were found between the levels of achievement in second target language Listening and second target language Reading. There may be differences in the second category of students at B2; however, a further study would be necessary to examine this in more detail.

**Figure 10: Results in second target language Writing by number of years learning**



\* 4 - 5 years of learning

Figure 10 shows the results for second target language Writing. In the first category of students, 83% achieve A1 and higher in German Writing, while 53% of students achieve A1. The proportion of students who do not achieve the targeted level is 17% and refers to pre-A1, while 21% of students achieve A2. There is only a small proportion of students who demonstrate a high level of proficiency: 7% achieve B1 and 2% achieve B2.

In the second, somewhat smaller, category of students, almost 79% achieve level A or higher; 48% achieve A1, 21% achieve A2, 9% achieve B1 and 0.5% achieve B2, while 21% of students are at pre-A1.

In general, according to the results shown above, it seems that there are no significant differences between the first and second category of students regarding the level of achievement in Listening and Reading at A1 and higher. Perhaps we could find possible differences that would indicate better achievement, especially at level A2 for the category of students who had been learning the target language for five to six years. However, the achievement of B1 and B2 is possibly lower in both categories of students.

## **6. Summary of results for Croatia provided in the ESLC Report**

Croatian students find that they have enough opportunities for exposure to the first target language in their living environment, which can probably be explained by the fact that Croatia is a country oriented towards tourism.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is offered in fewer than 10% of schools. In addition, the mean specialist language profile of Croatian teachers is lower than the mean of teachers in other adjudicated entities. Besides the fact that the tested schools do not have a high language profile, there should be more foreign languages on offer in schools. Students should also have the possibility to learn more foreign languages than is compulsory. Enrichment and remedial lessons are provided in almost 90% of schools.

The use of ICT in teaching foreign languages is very limited in Croatia: fewer than 10% of schools use ICT. Schools report very low availability of software for language assessment or language teaching: less than 0.3% of schools report access to such software.

Funding for exchange visits is also rather limited. As reported by principals, students' intercultural exchanges are hardly ever funded. The mean for both target languages is 0.3% or less. For both target languages, fewer than 5% of principals report that a guest teacher from abroad came to work in their school.

As reported by teachers in Croatia, 80% receive enough financial incentives for in-service training, which is compulsory. Teachers are allowed to participate in training during working hours.

As reported by principals, fewer than 10% of guest teachers received financial incentives from the European Union.

The majority of second target language students indicate that they chose it as an optional subject. The results show that, in Croatia, schools offer on average fewer than 2.5 foreign and ancient languages.

As reported by teachers, they place most emphasis on Speaking, Listening and Reading, while least emphasis is placed on Writing. The results for Croatia do not fully confirm this, since the results in Writing in both target languages are somewhat higher than the results in other tested skills.

## **7. Methodological description of statistical calculations**

The data analysis for this report was made with JMP<sup>®</sup> software, version 8.0.1, adapted to Windows OS (Copyright<sup>©</sup> 2009 SAS Institute Inc., Cary, USA). The mosaic diagrams were made with the *Fit Y by X* platform.

A mosaic diagram is a graphical illustration allowing insight into the relation of two categorical variables. The colour coding legend on the right of each diagram represents the CEFR levels. Red stands for pre-A1, orange stands for A1, yellow stands for A2, bright green stands for B1 and dark green stands for B2.

The diagram axis on the left represents the proportions of students by level of language skill/competence. The divisions at the bottom of each mosaic diagram show the proportion of different categories.

## **8. Limitations and Conclusion**

In this summary, we present only the basic descriptive parameters obtained after the implementation of the ESLC. The reason we decided to illustrate the levels of achievement without any additional linking to the background variables is that we focused on the main goal of the survey, which was to determine the levels of proficiency in the first and second target language in the final year of ISCED2 (in Croatia, the final grade of primary school, i.e. the eighth grade).

Since we are dealing with descriptive statistics, there are no clear indicators of statistically significant differences. The sample is also rather small, so it was fruitless to compare certain categories due to the small number of students.

We are planning to conduct in-depth analyses using the data set obtained from the ESLC and prove or disprove the assumptions presented in this summary.

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