

A comparative study of Croatian and Hungarian 8th graders' performances in English

The study describes a comparative research that aims to provide insights into Croatian and Hungarian 8th graders' performances in English as a foreign language (EFL). The study is undertaken in order to offer a basis for research-informed guidelines for a FL education policy reform.

A total of 717 14-year-old students participated in the study in two neighboring regions and towns of Croatia and Hungary. Two batteries of tests are used: one for measuring L1 proficiency and one for assessing EFL achievement. L1 battery includes tests of listening, reading and writing skills, and EFL battery comprises a test of speaking skill as well.

The study examines how Croatian and Hungarian 8th graders' performances compare

- on EFL tests
- by groups and within groups
- by length of instruction, weekly classes, and size of group
- with reference to the achievements on tests in their mother tongue (L1) and EFL.

The findings show that

- Croatian students performed significantly better on the EFL proficiency tests than their Hungarian counterparts
- larger differences have been found between groups' performances in Hungary than in Croatia
- no significant differences characterize within-group variations
- learners who started EFL earlier tend to achieve higher scores than later starters
- the findings on group size and weekly classes are more controversial, as Hungarian students had more exposure in smaller groups.

The authors ascribe the differences in results to differences in teaching quality and in the amount of out of class exposure to English.

Key words: foreign language (FL) education policy, language education reform, learning English as a foreign language (EFL), L1 proficiency; language skills, exposure to FL