

**International Conference on Public Policy & Social Sciences 2023**

13-15 September 2023

Organized by the Faculty of Administrative Science & Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Seremban Campus, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, and International University of Sarajevo (IUS), Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Examining Secondary School Students' Perceptions of EFL Classes**

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**Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to examine the way secondary school students perceive their English classes, including their awareness of the importance of learning English as a foreign language. The participants were 2,107 students enrolled in 9 secondary schools in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research instrument was a survey questionnaire. Qualitative method was applied in analysing the students' responses. The results show that, for students, the most important aspects of EFL classes are the following: teachers' understanding and respect towards students, fair assessment, clear explanations provided in class, and teachers' treating all students in class equally.

**Keywords:** secondary school students; EFL

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v9iSI22.5821>

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**1.0 Introduction**

The English language is the lingua franca and the most influential language in the world. In European schools, English is the most studied foreign language (Eurostat, 2012). English as a foreign language (EFL) has been in the focus of different research studies exploring both teaching and learning. From the modern education perspective, learners and their concerns are at the heart of every pedagogical approach and teaching method. Rather than simply focusing on the skills to be covered and developed, the teacher's primary concern in the learner-centred classroom is to understand their student population (Long & Robinson, 1998). In the context of language teaching and learning, language is defined as a *practice that constructs, and is constructed by, the ways learners understand themselves, their social surroundings, their histories, and their possibilities for the future* (Norton & Toohey, 2004, p. 1). According to Kohn (2006), persons involved in the education of children need to ask themselves two important questions: *what do children need, and how can we meet those needs* (p. xv). For that reason, student feedback is invaluable for improvements of the learning and teaching processes. Thus, studies which stem from students' feedback should be used to analyse their perspectives, detect any issues and improve the system of teaching, whereby students' learning will be improved as well.

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The purpose of the study at hand is to explore secondary school students' perceptions of their EFL classes in the educational context of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and to allow their voices to be heard. In the aftermath of the terrible aggression and destruction during 1992-1995 war, BiH is still striving to conduct all the necessary reforms on its path toward the aspired EU membership. This includes reforms of the education system, for which relevant authorities need to listen to teachers and other professionals in the field, but also to students, their voices and concerns. The objective of the study is to determine the way secondary school students perceive English classes and to identify the most important aspects of EFL teaching and learning. This will enable a more thorough analyses of the current practices at secondary schools and contribute to more comprehensible reforms of the education system. The following research questions have been established:

RQ1: How do secondary school students perceive English language learning?

RQ2: What are the most important aspects of EFL classes for secondary school students?

## 2.0 Literature Review

Students are the most important agents of the education system. The purpose of schools and public education institutions is to meet students' needs for growth, knowledge, socialising, and their overall wellbeing. According to Hoidn and Reusser (2021), education and learning are parallel to personal growth. The teacher forms a rapport with students, supports them and helps them become independent lifelong learners. Students are not simply regarded as empty vessels to be filled or as passive recipients. They come to school with their own experiences, *misconceptions, expectations, interests and attitudes that have to be taken into account* (Hoidn & Reusser, 2021, p. 53). Any strategy on improving schools or reforming education system in a country should take into consideration students' views and opinions.

### 2.1 Secondary school students

Teachers who teach secondary school students need to be mindful of the peculiar stage of their physical, mental and emotional development, and to familiarise themselves with students' views of education and school. Secondary school students are adolescents who are particularly vulnerable. Their identities and values are changing while they are trying to determine *who they are, their place among their peers, and where they fit in the larger society* (Hargreaves et al., 1996, p. 10). Adolescents carry with them a variety of advantages and disadvantages from their homes. Among disadvantages that affect them are poverty, unemployment and low wages of parents, or instability of the family (Child, 1993, p. 302). Some adolescents are under the pressure of high expectations from their family, while others have different disabilities. The teacher needs to be aware of all these issues and be able to respond sensitively in the classroom (Turner, 2004). According to Harmer (2012), teachers who teach adolescents need to encourage critical thinking in their students and guide students to form their own opinions and to question the topics discussed in class. They need to treat students as adults, while bearing in mind that they are still children. Teachers should promote students' autonomy and agency. They need to be well organised and consistent in dealing with discipline issues. Also, it is noteworthy that adolescents have high energy, but it may lead to discipline issues in the classroom if it is not properly channelled (Harmer, 2012). Adolescents have ability for abstract thought, they may have passionate commitment to what they are doing, and they understand the need for learning, which all make them exciting students, but they are often regarded as *problem students* (Harmer, 2007, p. 83). In a language learning classroom, unlike younger learners who are frequently receptive, teenagers are described as *more defensive, resentful and uncooperative* (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 157). Nevertheless, it is necessary to discover and understand the causes of such behaviour, rather than merely impose strict rules or, worse, punish such students.

Teenagers sometimes do not quite see the purpose of doing something, or do not want to see it; therefore, the teacher needs to explain the aims and benefits of each lesson especially to teenagers (Harmer, 2012). Clearly stating the learning outcomes, for example listing 2-3 specific lesson aims at the beginning of the class, will help the teacher keep the students' attention and interest. Also, adolescents can be very creative, and the teacher should provide proper guidance towards certain tasks or projects, whereby they will be able to express their ideas and enthusiasm (Harmer, 2012). Finally, for adolescents, it is very important to know and see that the teacher is *interested in their progress and wellbeing*, and, most importantly, that *the teacher is fair and treats all students the same* (Harmer, 2012, p. 91). On the other hand, the phenomenon of students disliking school has become widespread among both primary and secondary school students. One of the major issues secondary school students report in their reflection on schooling is the fact that schooling very often boils down to students being tested and marked. According to Blum (2016), students are aware of the dominance of marks over their school life; they recognize and sometimes deplore the central position marks have in schools. Some students are conscious of the difference between genuine learning and doing something just for marks and they see marks as preventing learning (Blum, 2016). Marks turn students' attention away from learning to the mere surface performance, from observing schools as places where their abilities can be improved to places where they need to avoid negatives and get positives (Morrison, 2007).

### 2.2 Secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In BiH, secondary education lasts for 4 years, or 3 years in some vocational schools. English is the first and foremost foreign language taught at primary and secondary level of formal education in BiH. Research suggests that the two most in-demand skills in the labour market in BiH are computer literacy and English language proficiency (Federation of BiH Ministry of Education and Science, 2013). Therefore, the importance of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in BiH can hardly be overestimated in the context of the country's ongoing development. Secondary school students have been learning English for years during their primary education.

Their years-long experience of learning English and being taught by different teachers makes them first-hand witnesses of what works and what does not work in English language learning and teaching in BiH. They are in the position to provide valuable insights to all the stakeholders. In BiH, secondary school students are burdened with long-term consequences of the past war, politics of division, inefficient education system and trans-generational traumas. Research shows that the rate of poverty among children (31%) is even higher than the rate of poverty of the population overall (23%) (Krajišnik et al., 2021, p. 8). And yet, children's concerns and problems are not properly addressed, and they do not receive the support they need. Many students want to leave the country upon finishing secondary education. Secondary school students in BiH and the youth in general are perceived as passive and lacking initiative, and they are even accused of apathy. However, according to Kasumagić-Kafedžić (2009), the question arises whether anyone has the right to criticize the youth for being passive and wanting to leave the country, considering what they were given by adults and all the relevant authorities. Nobody taught young people to become involved in the society, nobody encouraged them to become engaged, to think critically, to be confident and to learn about their rights. In the education system, ideas are not exchanged, but dictated; educating does not mean debating or discussing, but lecturing; teaching does not imply *working with*, but *working on* students and making them adhere to orders: learning means accepting and storing information silently (Kasumagić-Kafedžić, 2009, p. 95).

In 2018, BiH participated in PISA survey of secondary school students for the first time. The test results confirmed that the education system is facing major issues and that improvements must be made in a systematic and thorough way. Among the issues reported by students were classroom discipline issues, assessment issues and the fact that some teachers do not modify the class content when students struggle to understand it. Some of the recommendations for the education authorities include: development of reading proficiency at all levels of education; overcoming obstacles in the teaching process, strengthening teacher competences and meeting students' needs for learning, acquiring new knowledge and skills; and development of new evaluation strategies to improve evaluation and monitoring of learning outcomes (Džumhur, 2019). Comprehensive reforms of the education system are needed, whereby students' needs should be at the focus of all the relevant stakeholders. Proper education is the most important step in overcoming poverty and improving the wellbeing of individuals and society overall.

### 3.0 Methodology

In the research, a cross-sectional exploratory survey was conducted to study the relevant groups of students. The research is based on qualitative data obtained from the participants' answers to open-ended questions in the student questionnaire. The students' answers represent rich content that could be analysed from different perspectives. In order to encompass all the topics and subtopics which have emerged in their answers, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted. Thematic analysis provides a flexible framework in which qualitative coding of data helps identify, categorise, and analyse key concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the participants' answers were all logged as raw data, perused and analysed carefully. Second, initial codes were generated to structure the data, whereupon a number of main themes and subthemes emerged. All the themes and subthemes were analysed, reviewed, organized and refined. The results of the qualitative analysis communicate the richness of the students' experiences and their valuable insights in the EFL classes.

#### 3.1 The instrument

The instrument applied was a survey questionnaire that was developed for a wider study of perceptions of EFL teaching and learning by secondary school students in BiH. The instrument was piloted and its reliability was confirmed. The research at hand stems from the data obtained from the students' answers to the open-ended question in the survey and two statements analysed as scales.

#### 3.2 The participants

The total number of 2107 students from secondary schools in Sarajevo Canton participated in the survey. All 35 secondary schools in Sarajevo Canton were contacted and asked to participate in the research. In total, 9 secondary schools responded positively. Tables 1, 2 and 3 show the overview of student data.

Table 1. Students' gender

		Students' gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Males	802	38.1	38.3	38.3
	Females	1290	61.2	61.7	100.0
	Total	2092	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	15	.7		
Total		2107	100.0		

Table 2. Students' grade

		Students' grade			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	first grade	620	29.4	29.4	29.4
	second grade	579	27.5	27.5	56.9
	third grade	430	20.4	20.4	77.3
	fourth grade	478	22.7	22.7	100.0

	Total	2107	100.0	100.0	
Table 3. Students' marks					
Students' marks in English Language course					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 insufficient	11	.5	.5	.5
	2 sufficient	251	11.9	12.0	12.6
	3 good	404	19.2	19.4	32.0
	4 very good	622	29.5	29.8	61.8
	5 excellent	796	37.8	38.2	100.0
	Total	2084	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	23	1.1		
Total		2107	100.0		

Out of the total number of students, 62% were females and 38% were males. With regard to the grade they attended, 620 students (29.4%) were in the first grade of secondary education, 579 (27.5%) were in the second grade, 430 (20.4%) in the third grade, while 478 (22.7%) were in the fourth grade. In secondary schools in BiH, student achievement is measured with a 5-mark system, with 5 (excellent) as the highest mark, followed by 4 (very good), 3 (good), 2 (sufficient), and 1 (insufficient) as the lowest, failing mark. The students who participated in the survey had the following marks in English Language course: 796 students had excellent (5) marks, 622 students had very good marks (4), 404 students had good (3) marks, 251 students had sufficient (2) marks, while 11 had insufficient (1) or failing marks.

## 4.0 Findings

With the aim of answering the first research question and examining the way secondary school students perceive English language learning, they were asked to express their level of agreement with the following two statements: (i) *Learning English language is important for us students regardless of which profession we will have in future life*; and (ii) *I like English classes in this school*. The students provided their answers on continuous 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly agree (5), to Agree (4), Neither agree nor disagree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the students' answers in percent values.

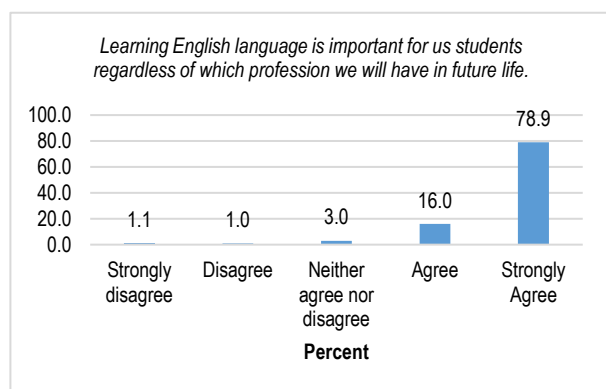


Fig. 1: Perception of learning English

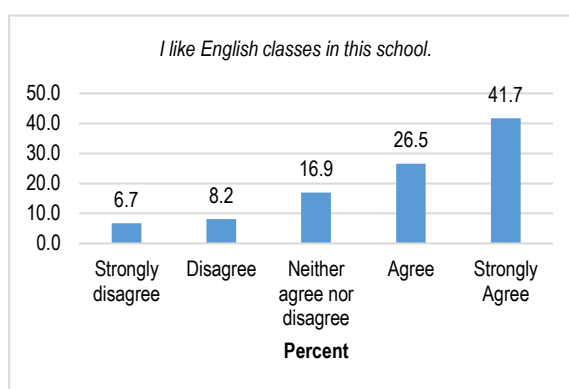


Fig. 2: Perception of English classes

Regarding the statement on the importance of learning English language for students regardless of their future profession, the overwhelming majority of students strongly agreed (78.9%) or agreed (16%) with the statement. The total of 3% of students were neutral, 1% disagreed and 1.1% strongly disagreed with the statement. When it comes to liking English classes at their school, 41.7% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, 26.5% agreed, 16.9% were neutral, 8.2% disagreed and 6.7% strongly disagreed with the statement. The second research question aims at exploring the most important aspects of EFL classes for secondary school students. In the open-ended question, students were asked to provide their feedback on their EFL classes and note anything they consider relevant. The students provided a variety of interesting remarks on their EFL classes. Their responses were classified in the following main themes: (i) positive remarks, (ii) negative remarks and suggestions for improvements, (iii) remarks on English language learning, and (iv) other remarks. Some remarks included a variety of issues students perceived; therefore, the aforementioned classification is not very strict. Table 4 presents an overview of the identified main themes and subthemes.

Table 4. Main themes and subthemes	
Main themes	Subthemes
Positive remarks	Remarks on English classes Remarks on EFL teachers

Negative remarks and suggestions for improvements	Need for a better English teacher Assessment issues Treating students equally in class Classroom discipline issues Better relationship between teachers and students
Remarks on English language learning	The importance of learning English Improving EFL classes Focus on other languages and subjects
Other remarks	Remarks on school and students' rights Remarks on the survey Additional remarks

Regarding the students' positive remarks, they pertained to English classes, teachers and teaching. Table 5 presents an overview of the identified subthemes for this main theme and examples of students' answers.

Table 5. Positive remarks	
Main theme: Positive remarks	
Subthemes	Examples
Remarks on English classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>English language is very important for us and I like our English classes.</i></li> <li>- <i>English lessons are wonderful.</i></li> <li>- <i>Every single English class is interesting because every time we learn something new, do a variety of exercises and acquire knowledge which will be useful for us later in life. The English teacher tries hard to explain each new word and she has understanding for the problems students face. The teacher respects us and together we make decisions related to classes. She is the top teacher!</i></li> <li>- <i>Our English teacher is very good and I love attending her classes. English language is one of my favourite subjects.</i></li> </ul>
Remarks on EFL teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Our English teacher is the best!</i></li> <li>- <i>We love our English teacher. We appreciate her knowledge and effort.</i></li> <li>- <i>The English teacher is like our second mother.</i></li> <li>- <i>Our English teacher is very fair. She explains everything to us as many times as necessary for us to understand it.</i></li> <li>- <i>Our English teacher is fantastic! She explains everything to us clearly and she is very intelligent.</i></li> <li>- <i>Every English class is very interesting and I believe all the students can participate in class.</i></li> <li>- <i>Our English teacher is great, just and kind.</i></li> <li>- <i>I would like to praise our English teacher because she has understanding for us students. She is persistent and she tries hard to make us all succeed.</i></li> <li>- <i>Our English teacher is very fair and professional. She explains everything to us and she is great... I am very pleased with her and I am very happy I have an opportunity to speak English with my teacher. All praises for my teacher!</i></li> </ul>

The students' negative remarks and suggestions for improvements of EFL classes included remarks on needs for a better English teacher, assessment issues, the importance of the teacher's treating all students in class equally, classroom discipline issues and needs for a better relationship between teachers and students. Table 6 presents an overview of the identified subthemes for this main theme and examples of students' answers.

Table 6. Negative remarks and suggestions for improvements	
Main theme: Negative remarks and suggestions for improvements	
Subthemes	Examples
Need for a better English teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I believe English Language course is one of the most important courses and, for that reason, I think we need a better English teacher.</i></li> <li>- <i>We want another English teacher, somebody who will have more understanding for us, students, who will have a better relationship with us; (we need) a better cooperation between students and the teacher. We need our English classes to be less stressful.</i></li> </ul>
Assessment issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I would like to add that sometimes we do not get the mark we deserve.</i></li> <li>- <i>Our English teacher should be stricter and give failing marks to the students who deserve them.</i></li> <li>- <i>Our grade point average is not the most important thing. The most important thing is a student's willingness to improve and his hard work. For example, if a student has the following marks: 1, 4, 4, 4, the student should have the final mark 4, not 3, because it means he has improved.</i></li> <li>- <i>I believe each and every language teacher should try harder to teach us more words and find ways how students can learn better and more, instead of just having marking students as their ultimate goal.</i></li> <li>- <i>We need easier tests!</i></li> </ul>

Treating students equally in class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students who do not speak English very well should be encouraged to be active in class, since that would be the best way for them to learn English (they should not be ashamed of the fact that they do speak English at that moment).</li> <li>- It is easy for the students who speak English well to have good marks and they are the ones who participate in class activities. Everybody should be included in class discussions.</li> </ul>
Classroom discipline issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers need to pay more attention to student discipline in class. It would make our work in class much easier.</li> <li>- Our English classes are too noisy.</li> </ul>
Better relationship between teachers and students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We need our English teacher to have a better relationship toward us and to show more respect to students.</li> <li>- I think teachers need to have more understanding for those students who work hard and try to have a better mark.</li> </ul>

The students' remarks on English language learning were related to the importance of learning English, needs for improving EFL classes and remarks on students' focus on other languages and subjects. Table 7 presents an overview of the identified subthemes for this main theme and examples of students' answers.

Table 7. English language learning	
Main theme: English language learning	
Subthemes	Examples
The importance of learning English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I would like to add that learning foreign languages, English specifically, is very important for us, students, because, in that way, we learn how to be better and more useful for our community.</li> <li>- English language is the most important course for us during our education, since tomorrow we will all be expected to speak English. Bad foundations in English will bring us a lot of problems.</li> </ul>
Improving EFL classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think that English Language course has been neglected to some extent and its importance has been belittled. We should have more English classes per week and pay much more attention to learning English language.</li> <li>- Our English classes are not bad, but they could be improved a lot. Everybody should dedicate more time to learning, both students and the teacher.</li> <li>- As far as our English classes are concerned, I believe they should be more interesting and creative so that we, students, would be more motivated to learn and have better results.</li> <li>- I think learning English, and other languages too, would be much more interesting if the teachers are given more space and freedom in organizing the classes. The curriculum is boring. The classes inevitably become monotonous.</li> <li>- English Language course and English classes should be organized so that students benefit from learning English. Classes should be based on interactive teacher-student communication. English language is very important to us and should be emphasised in every way.</li> <li>- We need less theory, more <u>practice</u>!!!!</li> <li>- The only thing I do not like is the fact that we need to memorise facts from our textbook. I really think we do not need that. Apart from that, the English teacher is great and she always explains everything to us clearly.</li> </ul>
Focus on other languages and subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students in secondary schools should be offered to choose between learning English or German language.</li> <li>- Too much importance is given to foreign languages, and not enough importance is given to our native language.</li> <li>- Learning English language is very important in 21<sup>st</sup> century and we need it to communicate with people from all over the world. However, I think that, for our profession, we need to dedicate more time to other courses.</li> </ul>

All the other remarks by students were classified into three groups: remarks on school and students' rights, remarks on survey and additional remarks. Table 8 presents an overview of the identified subthemes for the main theme Other remarks and examples of students' answers.

Table 8. Other remarks	
Main theme: Other remarks	
Subthemes	Examples
Remarks about school and students' rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In this school nobody cares about students' opinion and students have too many obligations!!!</li> <li>- Students need to have more rights.</li> <li>- They never ask us what we think!</li> <li>- This school offers students knowledge from all the courses, but students do not want to study.</li> </ul>
Remarks about the survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I like this survey and I think it was a great thing to ask us what we think so that others would know that.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>We need more surveys like this in this school. Students' opinions should be taken into consideration.</i></li> <li>- <i>I would like to thank you for being interested in my opinion! (heart symbol drawn) I really appreciate that! It makes me feel happy! God bless you.</i></li> <li>- <i>As far as this topic is concerned, I have to say it is not very important and we need to discuss more important things, such as global warming which has been threatening us for years and all the natural disasters which happen all the time. The crisis in our country is our biggest problem.</i></li> </ul>
Additional remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>We are not robots!!!</i></li> <li>- <i>It's not all black.</i></li> </ul>

## 5.0 Discussion

Considering the students' answers to the two statements related to the importance of learning English language and whether they like their English classes at school, the majority of students provided positive answers. They overwhelmingly agreed that learning English is important for them regardless of which profession they will have in future. Overall, majority of students like English classes at their school. The results show positive perception of EFL classes among secondary school students in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In their answers to the open-ended question, the students provided many positive comments about their English classes and English teachers. They expressed their awareness of the importance of English language for their education. They described their English classes as *wonderful* and *interesting*, pointing out that English is one of their *favourite* subjects, and that they *need more English classes*. The students were very enthusiastic in praising their English teachers, who were described as: *the best teacher, cool, the queen, like our second mother, very fair, fantastic, great, just, and kind*. Among the most prominent positive aspects of English teaching, the students described the teacher as being persistent, trying hard to help students succeed, explaining everything to students and helping them understand and learn English. Students expressed their appreciation for the teacher's knowledge and effort, and their love for their English teacher. Moreover, the students noted that the English teacher always teaches students something new and holds interesting classes, teaching students things that would be useful for them in future. Students appreciate the fact that their English teacher has understanding for them, respects them, includes them in the decision-making process and provides them with opportunities to speak English language. They also highlighted the fact that all students can participate in the English classes.

On the other hand, in their negative remarks and suggestions for improvements, the students expressed their dissatisfaction by wishing for a better English teacher. Some students pointed out the importance of learning English for their future. The most prominent objections by the students were related to assessment, followed by unequal treatment of students in class. Many students expressed their dissatisfaction with the marks they get. Some students noted that marks were not fair, that they did not get the marks they deserve, and even that marks depend on the teacher's mood. One student clearly noted being discouraged from learning in the situation when the teacher did not give the student the mark the student deserved. Another student called for the teacher to have more understanding towards students who work hard. Some students hold that the teacher should be stricter when marking students, should examine students more often, and should assess students' group work as well. Some students noted that the teacher demands too much from them; they ask for easier tests and for the teacher not to demand too much for the passing mark. One student noted that testing has no purpose and that the teacher does not ask students clear questions during assessment. Finally, one student clearly pointed out that marks should not be the teacher's *ultimate goal*, but making sure that students *learn better and more*. The students' comments are in line with results of studies that point out the overemphasis on marks and tests in schools and its negative effects on students.

The teacher's fair and equal treatment of all students in the class is very important to students. Students point out the importance of the English teacher paying attention to all students in class, those who can speak English and those who cannot, to enable the learning of *all* students. Students object to the teacher who does not treat all the students in the class equally and who only works with one group of students. Some students noticed that their English teacher is only working with students who can speak English well and that such students are engaged in classroom activities. It was underlined that all students should partake in classroom discussions. Another major objection noted by the students is related to classroom discipline issues. Some students complain about English classes being too noisy. Noisy classes hinder students' learning and may lead to unfair assessment. Classroom discipline issues bother students and they call on teachers to do something about it. Their comments confirm the results of PISA survey and the negative effect of classroom discipline issues. Also, some students pointed out the teachers' lack of respect and understanding towards students. Students call for the teachers to have a better relationship with them and ask for less stressful classes.

Regarding English language learning, the students confirmed their high awareness of the importance of learning English as a foreign language. Students stated that they want their English teachers to cover more lessons in class, to teach them more vocabulary, and explain the materials more thoroughly. In English classes, there should be more practice and less theory. Also, students point out that English classes need to be creative, interesting and more interactive, which will motivate students to learn better. Students who do not speak English well should not be ashamed of that and they should be encouraged to be active in class. Students highlighted the prominent role their English teachers have in their education.

Some students pointed out the importance of other foreign languages and their native language. A student noted that students should be allowed to choose between learning German or English. Some believe that, for their future profession, they need to dedicate more time to other courses. In their remarks, some students complained about their school and noted that they have too many

obligations. Students demand more freedom and more rights at school. One student noted that the school offers knowledge to students, but students are the ones who do not study. Students point out that they need to have more attention from teachers and more respect from teachers and school administration. In the comments on the survey, students warmly expressed their gratitude to the researcher for asking for their opinion and wished for more surveys to be conducted. Finally, in other remarks, students expressed variety of opinions and comments, some of which were striking exclamations which bring adults' attention to their thoughts and concerns, such as: *We are not robots!* Indeed, parents, teachers and other adults need to listen to what their teenagers have to say.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The answer to the first research question is that secondary school students have positive perception of English language learning: they consider it important for their future regardless of which profession they will pursue. Regarding the second research question, given the prominence of the themes and subthemes which emerged in the survey, it follows that, for secondary school students, the most important aspects of EFL classes are: teachers' understanding and respect towards students, fair assessment, clear explanations provided in class, and teachers' treating all students in class equally. The most important thing for students and their learning is to have a relationship of understanding and respect with their teachers. The relationship of mutual respect, understanding, and support will lead to development and wellbeing of not only students, but also teachers. Also, student assessment needs to be conducted with the purpose of students' learning and growth. Students themselves are profoundly aware when marks are the focus of teachers' work rather than true learning. Such an approach is very discouraging and demotivating for students. EFL teachers need to ensure that students' learning and growth are the main outcomes of their classroom activities. Teachers need to put their students' needs first. Teachers need to provide clear explanations in class to ensure that students understand lessons and achieve deep learning. Students appreciate teachers who can clearly explain the materials and topics discussed, and who persist in helping all the students succeed. In their classrooms, teachers need to treat all students in an equal manner. English teachers need to pay sufficient attention to students who struggle with English and give them opportunities to improve their skills. Of course, students who are more proficient should also be provided with stimulating tasks and challenged to continue growing.

Listening to students and considering their feedback should be crucial steps in any education reform process. This is particularly important for countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, where new generations carry heavy burdens of recent traumatic history, but also of expectations regarding the country's development and prosperity. Education is the foundation of that development. Schooling should not be teacher-centred but student-centred in the best sense of that word, with the teachers aware of their profound influence on their students' learning and lives. Teachers themselves need to be aware that they are the agents of positive change, not only in the education system, but in society overall.

Regarding limitations of the study, the research at hand is limited to one canton of the FBiH and it may be expanded to include students from other cantons and other parts of the country. A wider sample will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the students' perceptions of teaching and learning. Further research may also include other foreign language classes, which would allow for comparative analyses to be conducted.

## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

The paper provides valuable insights for secondary school teachers in general and foreign language teachers and EFL teachers in particular on secondary school students' perceptions and expectations of teaching and learning processes. The results and conclusions reached provide guidelines for relevant education authorities regarding which aspects of teachers' continuous professional development to address in order to improve teaching practices and ensure ongoing education and training of in-service teachers. In addition, teacher education programs and foreign language education programs should take students' feedback into account when reviewing and improving the existing curricula.

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