

## **EVS-volunteers in English / German class – Impact on foreign language learning**

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### **Abstract.**

EVS-volunteers have been part of our primary school's life since 2008 when our first volunteer joined our English and German classes. Ever since, each year we host one permanent EVS from EU countries through Erasmus Plus exchange, via youth centre Litija.

Every year a young EVS-volunteer (male or female) helps at our main school as well as our four branch schools for four times a week. This is a relatively new project, since most EVS volunteers work at youth centres only. At our school, an EVS-volunteer works with different teachers in various classes, mostly English and German classes, but also sports, Slovene, Maths, art or history classes. They give presentations on their country of origin, teach their culture, a bit of their language, music, folk dances and history, sometimes they even help with regular learning topics from the curriculum.

In my article I wanted to find out how students' understanding and perception of English and German as foreign language changed because we had hosted EVS volunteers. I also wanted to find out if the students' views of foreign countries and their people changed as well.

Our students were impressed by young people from other countries who in their presentations share their lifestyles, culture, language, and enrich our students' understanding of language learning in many ways. They lose fear of speaking to foreigners in English or German, since most of them are very young and they accept them as their peers, not as teachers.

**Keywords:** EVS, volunteers, German / English classes, impact

### **1. Introduction**

EVS projects and volunteers have been a part of Primary School Gradec in Litija and our four branch schools since 2008. From 2008 till 2013 they were staying in Trbovlje, since 2012 they have been guests at Youth Centre Litija, staying at a local farm. Most of them were volunteers at the youth centres Trbovlje and Litija, but some of them were volunteers at primary schools in the neighbouring towns.

I invited most of them to my English classes for grades 4 to 9 to make presentations about their country, culture, food, famous cities, music, art, history, geography etc. . They helped with my classes mostly for two weeks, except an American volunteer Owen, who attended for almost a

month. Another exception were 'daily' volunteers who usually worked at a Youth Centre and only came to our school on one occasion. I have hosted them in my classes since 2011.

Colleague German teachers at our main school had German volunteers with all their German classes on a daily basis. They helped them as assistants for class activities, group work, conversation exercises and reading. Sometimes volunteers also helped in the Extended Stay Classes, where they talked to the children and played with them as part of CLIL project. At our branch school at Vače not many students learn German, so I had them only a few times in German classes, but mainly in English.

Occasionally other subjects and other teachers also joined in - as for example Slovene, Art, Music, Maths and History classes.

EVS volunteers also enriched community life of towns Litija, Šmartno pri Litji and Gabrovka. At the Youth Centre Litija various events, multimedia workshop, animation workshop, DIY workshops, gardening workshops and presentations were successfully organized by them. (Martel)

I wanted to explore the influence these young EVS volunteers have had on our students and their understanding of foreign languages, especially English and German. I explored what personal qualities of EVS volunteers were important to students. I was also seeking answers on how this project changed our students' wishes of travelling to native countries of our EVS volunteers and if they themselves wanted to become a volunteer in the future.

## **2. Method and results**

### **2.1 Method**

I focused my research on a voluntary questionnaire for my students, consisting of 11 questions that I drafted myself in June of 2019. Due to covid crisis we did not have any volunteers in 2021, so the answers refer to previous ones. Since I am a foreign language teacher at Branch Primary School Vače, only those students were included in the questionnaire. Out of 77 students from grades 4 to 9 (aged 10 – 15), 63 participated. Younger children met only some of the volunteers, the older ones met most of them, so their answers were limited to those volunteers they knew.

The survey consisted of two sheets of paper. On the first there was a table with pictures and names of EVS volunteers, so that children would remember them and write their names correctly. The list included 10 EVS volunteers from Germany, Ireland, the USA, Austria, Italy, Spain and France.

On the second sheet there were 11 questions; some were Yes / No – questions, some were open-ended-questions. Students answered those as follows in the Results bellow.

## 2.2 Results

As previously mentioned, out of 77 students from grades 4 to 9 (aged 10 – 15), 63 answered the questionnaire, that makes 81,8%. The rest did not want to participate. In grade 4 there were 9/11 participants, in grade 5 12/15, in grade 6 13/17, in grade 7 11/12, in grade 8 9/13 and in grade 9 9/9 participants.

Students' replies are given in the tables bellow, one table for each question.

Table 1: Question 1 on EVS volunteers

	Question 1. Which of the EVS volunteers do you remember best and why?
Grade 4	<p><b>9 x Anja W.:</b>                      -2x She was very nice.                      -2x She smiled a lot.                      -2x She was the latest EVS at our school.                      -1x She comes from Germany, the same as my friend.                      -1x She made interesting presentations.                      -1x I liked her pink hair.</p>
Grade 5	<p><b>6 x Anja W.:</b>                      -2x She was very friendly.                      -2x She smiled a lot.                      -2x She was the latest EVS at our school.</p>
Grade 6	<p><b>8 x Anja W.:</b>                      -3x She made interesting presentations.                      -2x She smiled a lot.                      -2x She was the latest EVS at our school.                      -1x I liked her favourite music.</p>
Grade 7	<p><b>11 x Owen M.:</b>                      -4x His presentations were very interesting.                      -3x He made great introduction of Hawaii.                      -2x He wanted to talk to us during breaks / at the canteen.                      -1x We saw him a lot (i.e. 25 classes).                      -1x He introduced us typical American food, animals and holiday making.</p>
Grade 8	<p><b>8 x Owen M.:</b>                      -4x He had great presentations of his walking journeys.                      -1x He wanted to learn Slovene.                      -1x He made us laugh.                      -1x His way towards Slovenia was fascinating.                      -1x I was never bored in class.</p> <p><b>1 x Connor D.:</b>                      -1x I liked his presentation.</p>
Grade 9	<p><b>9 x Owen M.:</b>                      - 5x He gave the best presentation of his walking journeys.                      -1x He very interestingly presented his first visit to Slovenia.                      -1x He prepared very interesting video presentations.                      -1x He had the most interesting biography.                      -1x He was very relaxed.</p>

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 2: Question 2 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 2. Which personal characteristics did you like the best with this EVS volunteer or volunteers in general?</b>
Grade 4	-4x fun, -2x witty -2x liked talking to us -1x speaks many foreign languages
Grade 5	-5x fun -3x friendly -2x a native speaker -1x likes recording and editing videos -1x speaks clearly
Grade 6	-4x friendly -2x interesting -2x a sports person -2x likes hiking -2x is a native speaker -1x likes drawing
Grade 7	-6x friendly -2x likes hiking -2x fun -2x positive -1x prepared to answer all our questions, including »stupid« ones
Grade 8	-4x friendly -2x interesting personality -2x witty -1x daring (pink hair!)
Grade 9	-3x fun -3x native speaker -3x adventurous

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 3: Question 3 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 3. Is there anything that you didn't like about EVS volunteers?</b>
Grade 4	-4x nothing -2x he/she spoke English only -2x I did not understand him/her -1x he has a shaven-head
Grade 5	-8x nothing -2x he/she is very shy and silent -2x he/she doesn't say much
Grade 6	-12x nothing -1x he/she looks like he/she doesn't want to be here
Grade 7	-9x nothing -2x when they don't say much, and we don't have many questions, then there's an awkward situation
Grade 8	-8x nothing -1x he/she talks too much about his/her personal life, but too little about their country of origin
Grade 9	-4x nothing -3x he/she speaks too silently -2x their presentation was not interesting

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 4: Question 4 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 4. What do you find most interesting in learning about a new culture, a country, a foreign language?</b>
Grade 4	-5x exploring new places with his / her presentations / pictures -3x he/she speaks many foreign languages -1x nothing
Grade 5	-4x meeting foreigners -4x exploring new places with his / her videos -3x a new language (German) -1x a library in Germany
Grade 6	-5x exploring new places with his/her presentations/pictures -5x to learn new words in English/German -3x to learn that other countries are so beautiful and interesting
Grade 7	-5x to learn how people live in other countries -4x to learn differences between Slovenia and other countries (food, customs, traditions) -2x to learn some words similar to Slovene
Grade 8	-5x to learn differences between Slovenia and other countries (food, customs, traditions) -2x to learn some words similar to Slovene -2x to learn some words in a foreign language
Grade 9	-5x exploring new places with his/her presentations/pictures -2x to learn differences between cultures -1x to learn new things about foreign countries -1x to find out there is such a variety of life in one world

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 5: Question 5 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 5. Has EVS volunteer's presence positively influenced your knowledge of English / German? Explain how.</b>
Grade 4	-4x Yes, I learnt a lot of new English words. -2x Yes, it was fun speaking in English only. -1x Yes, I want to start reading fairy tales in English now. -1x Yes, I learnt a lot of new things. -1x No, because I did not understand a lot.
Grade 5	-3x Yes, I learnt new words that we would normally not learn in class. -3x Yes, he/she talked in English and our teacher translated into Slovene. -3x Yes, we put the words down and learnt a lot. -3x Yes, I learnt even some German words.
Grade 6	-7x Yes, I learnt a lot of new words. -3x Yes, since we talked to him/her during our meals at school and learnt a lot of new words. -3x Yes, I loved their native accent.
Grade 7	-8x Yes, I learnt a lot of new English words. -3x Yes, since we talked to him/her during our meals at school and learnt a lot of new words.
Grade 8	-5x Yes, we spoke English only and learnt a lot. -3x Yes, I learnt American pronunciation of some words. -1x No, since I don't speak English that good.
Grade 9	-6x Yes, listening to them and talking to them I improved my English / German. -2x A little bit, since I already knew a lot of things. -1x My English was very good before, so he/she did not influence it. But I learnt a few German words.

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 6: Question 6 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 6. Has EVS volunteer's presence positively influenced your attitude towards a foreign language? Which language?</b>
Grade 4	-9x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards English. Now I can see it is very useful.
Grade 5	-12x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards English.
Grade 6	-13x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards English. -2x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards Spanish.
Grade 7	-11x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards English.
Grade 8	-9x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards English. -3x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards German.
Grade 9	-9x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards English. -4x Yes, it positively influenced my attitude towards German.

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 7: Question 7 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 7. Has EVS volunteer's presence influenced your opinion about members of a foreign nation? How? Explain.</b>
Grade 4	-5x Yes. They were all friendly. -4x No.
Grade 5	-12x Yes, I believed Germans were evil, but our German EVS volunteers were all friendly.
Grade 6	-12x Yes, relatives told us about WW2 Germans how evil they were, but EVS volunteers were friendly. -1x Yes, I believed Germany was very dry and full of rubbish, but volunteers changed this perception.
Grade 7	-10x Yes, it influenced positively since I learnt lots of new things. -1x No, I haven't had a stereotypical image of foreigners. I only learnt things about them now.
Grade 8	-9x Yes, I changed my opinion for many nations for better, especially Germans. Now I believe most of them are friendly.
Grade 9	-6x Yes, I've always liked foreigners and their experiences before, but now I like them even more. -2x Yes, we were able to get to know some of their characteristics. -1x No, since I do not want to conclude anything. EVS volunteers are only one person, not the whole nation.

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 8: Question 8 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 8. Have you wished for even deeper knowledge about a foreign culture, a foreign language and/or a foreign country?</b>
Grade 4	-7x Yes. -2x No.
Grade 5	-10x Yes. -2x No.
Grade 6	-11x Yes. -2x No.
Grade 7	-10x Yes. -1x No.
Grade 8	-8x Yes.

	-1x No.
Grade 9	-7x Yes. -1x Yes, but I'd like to go on holiday there, not learn about it at school. -1x No.

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 9: Question 9 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 9. Are you sometimes bored in class with EVS volunteers? If yes, when?</b>
Grade 4	8x No, not at all. 1x Yes, sometimes when they don't speak clearly.
Grade 5	10x No, not at all. 2x Yes, often.
Grade 6	11x No, not at all. 2x Yes, sometimes when we don't know what else to ask.
Grade 7	9x No, not at all. 2x Yes, when presentations are too long, or topics repeat themselves.
Grade 8	7x No, not at all. 1x Yes, when they talk too much about themselves and not about their country. 1x Yes, when their biographies are too similar.
Grade 9	8x No, not at all. 1x Yes, when volunteers' presentations are boring.

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 10: Question 10 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 10. Having met EVS volunteer(s) have you wished to visit any foreign countries? If, yes, which one?</b>
Grade 4	-7x Yes (2x Germany, 2x UK, 1x Spain, 1x Slovenia, 1x Italy) -2x No
Grade 5	-10x Yes (10x Hawaii, 2x Germany, 1x Ireland, 1x Spain) -2x No
Grade 6	-11x Yes (11x Hawaii, 5x Germany, 3x Ireland, 2x Spain, 1x UK) -2x No
Grade 7	-10x Yes (10x Hawaii, 4x Germany, 3x Ireland, 2x Spain, 1x Scotland) -1x No
Grade 8	-8x Yes (8x Hawaii, 3x Germany, 2x Ireland, 1x Spain, 1x England) -1x No
Grade 9	-8x Yes (8x Hawaii, 2x Germany, 2x Ireland, 2x Spain) -1x No

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

Table 11: Question 11 on EVS volunteers

	<b>Question 11. Would you like to go abroad as an EVS in the future? If yes, to which country? What would you like to do there?</b>
Grade 4	-1x I don't know yet. -4x Yes. (To Hawaii - I would represent Slovenia.) -4x No.
Grade 5	-3x Yes.

	(2x To Hawaii - I would represent Slovenia 1x to the UK – I would represent Slovenia) <b>-9x No</b>
Grade 6	<b>-3x Yes.</b> (1x to Scotland – I would represent Slovenia, 2x To Hawaii – I would represent Slovenia and its culture.) <b>-10x No</b>
Grade 7	<b>-4x Yes.</b> (2x To Hawaii – I would represent Slovenia and its culture 2x To Germany – to travel around as a tourist) <b>-7x No</b>
Grade 8	<b>-2x Yes.</b> (1x To Hawaii – I would represent Slovenia and its culture, 1x to Germany – to represent myself and Slovenia) <b>-7x No</b>
Grade 9	<b>-4x Yes.</b> (1x Anywhere, because I'm interested in travelling). 1x To the USA - teach students about Slovenia (culture, food, language). 1x To the UK - teach students about Slovenia 1x to Hawaii - teach students about Slovenia (culture, food, language). <b>-5x No</b>

Source: Questionnaire conducted by me

### 2.3 Discussion

The students' answers proved that EVS volunteers (those who worked as volunteers at our school full time or only came for a day's visit while working at the youth centre) had a prevalently positive impact on their experience of language, foreign countries, students' wishes to travel in the future, or even to become a volunteer themselves.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion we can find that presence of EVS volunteers influenced all students in some way, most of the time. Mostly they remembered two of them by name. Students found most of them to be friendly, witty and fun. Most students found their presentations and lessons on foreign culture, customs, habits, food, geography, music and art interesting. They liked exploring new countries and places by help of pictures, videos and conversations with volunteers. They also learnt a lot of new words in English, and some also in German. A lot of students believed that Germans were some bad people, since their bad reputation from WW2, but now they know they are just usual friendly people. Most students would like to visit Hawaii or Germany. About a third would like to be volunteers themselves. They would like to go to Germany, Hawaii or the UK to represent Slovenia, our language and our culture.

### References

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## **References**

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