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**CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO HEARING-IMPAIRED STUDENTS**

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**IZAZOVI POUČAVANJA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA UČENICIMA SA SLUŠNIM**

**OŠTEĆENJEM**

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(potpis)

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# 1. Introduction

In the last few decades, English has become the most influential language in the world, and its omnipresence in everyday life cannot be denied. It is the most commonly used language in international communication and plays a very important role in professional development. In today's world, when access to information has never been easier, a lack of proficiency in English can be a real stumbling block. Because of that, English is taught as a second or foreign language<sup>1</sup> in schools of most developed countries.

Providing equal learning opportunities to students with special educational needs (SEN), including hearing-impaired<sup>2</sup> (HI) students, has become a norm in educational systems across the world. In order for HI students to benefit from foreign language learning (FLL) in the same way as their hearing peers, materials and methods of teaching must be adapted to their needs and abilities. Using the same teaching methods with hearing and HI learners or exempting HI learners from FL classes violates their educational rights, which are stated in the Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html>). According to the Convention, all States Parties must ensure that lessons are delivered in the most appropriate means of communication, using alternative methods with respect to the individual needs of learners. Furthermore, the Convention recognizes the importance of qualified teachers and requires that all States Parties ensure teacher training which includes raising awareness of various disabilities, as well as learning about different modes of communication and ways of adapting teaching methods and materials.

This can be seen as a confirmation that teachers are a very important, if not the most important, facet of the educational system. In terms of the teacher role, students' achievements depend on various factors, among which are teachers' skills, knowledge, and conditions in

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<sup>1</sup> Saville-Troike (2006) defines a second language as “an official or societally dominant language needed for education, employment, and other basic purposes,” whereas a foreign language “is one not widely used in the learners' immediate social context,” but might be “studied as a curricular requirement or elective in school” (p. 4).

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘hearing-impaired’ is used in this work to refer to persons with all types of hearing loss and who use various modes of communication, although in the literature they are often referred to as ‘d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) persons’. The author recognizes the importance of this distinction and touches upon it later in the work, but for reasons of simplicity, the broader term will be used throughout this work.

which they work. This is especially true for teachers who work with students with SEN, including HI students. In order to improve the education of HI students, it is necessary to investigate conditions in which teachers work and their knowledge of special needs these students have. However, as proposed by Swanwick and Marschark (2010), research in this field is not focused on actual needs of the teachers, which calls for a greater cooperation between researchers and practitioners. Teachers should be asked about what they would like to know more so they could overcome challenges they meet, whereas researchers should ask themselves in what way the present theoretical findings can improve teaching practices and point further research in that direction.

This exploratory study is a small step in an attempt to do just that. Due to research on the subject of teaching English to HI learners being scarce in Croatia, our aim was to investigate at least one aspect of this complex process. Our focus was on the aspects of teaching process in both mainstream schools and special educational institutions in Zagreb. The study included teachers of English whose students communicated in either oral or visual (Croatian Sign Language) mode of communication.

The thesis consists of two parts. The first, theoretical part covers a wide range of issues related to teaching HI learners. It includes a description of legislative regulations in special needs education in Croatia and other countries; it discusses a few relevant aspects in second language acquisition<sup>3</sup> (SLA) and English language teaching (ELT) with regard to HI learners; it provides a description of cognitive and linguistic characteristics of HI learners of which teachers need to be aware; and gives an overview of recent research on teaching English to HI students. The second part presents the research conducted for the purpose of this thesis. It starts with a description of research methodology, continues with the analysis and discussion of results, and ends with a summary of the main findings and recommendations for future research.

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘second language acquisition’ in this work refers to what Medved-Krajnović (2010) described as both informal and formal acquisition or learning of any language other than the first language.

## **2. Theoretical background and recent research**

In order to properly address the very complex issue of teaching English to HI learners, it is necessary to consider various, often overlapping aspects, which we will address in the section that follows.

### ***2.1. Educational policies in Croatia***

A number of different national regulations and acts regulate the education of children with SEN in Croatia. Only those that are relevant to the topic of this thesis will be discussed in this section.

According to the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (Official Gazette, No. 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 86/12, 126/12, 94/13 and 152/14), the umbrella term ‘students with special educational needs’ refers to both gifted students and students with difficulties; the latter including children with developmental, learning, behavioral, and emotional difficulties, as well as children with difficulties conditioned by nurture, social, economic, cultural, and linguistic factors.

The Pedagogical Standard of Primary and Secondary Education in the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette, No. 63/08, 90/10) and Regulation on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities (Official Gazette, No. 24/15) define types of schools and programs children with disabilities can enroll in. In Croatia, the education of children with difficulties is organized in mainstream schools, via complete and partial integration, and in special educational institutions on both primary and secondary level. Children with minor difficulties are usually integrated into mainstream schools via complete integration. They attend classes according to either general curriculum with the use of individualized methods of teaching (individualized curriculum) or curriculum adjusted to their needs and capabilities, which includes adjusting both the teaching methods and the syllabus (adjusted curriculum). Children with severe or multiple difficulties are educated in either mainstream schools according to partial integration programs or in special educational institutions. Children with difficulties in both types of schools are entitled to different forms of support services, such as prolonged professional treatment or educational rehabilitation after or before classes, as well as



a paraprofessional or sign language interpreter during classes if the expert committee of the Regional Authority Office considers it necessary.

According to the Regulation on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities (Official Gazette, No. 24/15), teachers should develop syllabuses for children with disabilities for each student individually, based on their capabilities and in cooperation with expert associates working at the school. Dulčić, Pavičić Dokoza, Bakota, and Čilić Burušić (2012) agree that this is necessary and state that a single individualized or adjusted curriculum is impossible to make since every child is unique and reacts differently to the same situations and stimuli, even if they have the same diagnosis. They also emphasize that, prior to developing an individualized syllabus; teachers should be very well acquainted with the student's diagnosis, their strengths, and cognitive abilities.

The Regulation on Means, Methods and Elements of Assessing Students in Primary and Secondary School (Official Gazette, No. 112/10) recognizes the importance of meeting every student's individual needs and states that teachers should adapt means, methods, and elements of assessing to the student's difficulty and personality. Furthermore, the criteria of assessment should be developed in accordance with the guidelines received from expert associates.

The number of students per class is also recognized as an important factor. According to the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (Official Gazette, Nos. 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 86/12, 126/12, 94/13 and 152/14), the Prime Minister defines the number of students per class based on the Pedagogical Standard of Primary and Secondary Education in the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette, No. 63/08, 90/10). The Standard determines that the maximum number of students is 28. If a student with difficulties is integrated into a regular class, this number is reduced to 26. At most three students with difficulties can be integrated into a regular class, with the maximum number of students in that class being reduced to 20. However, Praznik and Valjak (2014) state that in practice deviations from these norms have been recorded.

As far as teaching English to HI students is concerned, there is currently only one document that provides guidelines to teachers of English on how to adapt the teaching methods and

syllabus to their needs - The Croatian National Educational Standard for the English Language<sup>4</sup> (Vican & Litre Milanović, 2006). It is available for download at the Education and Teacher Training Agency's web page (<http://www.azoo.hr/>). Although published several years ago, it is still in draft form and refers only to the primary level of education. It includes guidelines for the development of linguistic skills and knowledge for each year of primary education, methodological and assessment instructions, recommendations for lessons and units, and educational and social outcomes and contents. In each section, necessary adjustments for students with SEN are mentioned. For HI students, these recommendations are similar for each year of primary education and are rather vague. Teachers are recommended to provide visual and sound stimuli simultaneously; to tolerate difficulties in students' speech reproduction; to expect lower percentage of active and passive vocabulary acquisition; to provide more time for practice and tolerate mistakes in the acquisition of alphabet, articles, plural suffixes, adverbs, prepositions, pronouns, reading, and sentence intonation; to scaffold writing tasks and help students to correct mistakes themselves; to ask short and simple reading comprehension questions; and to use individualized assessment criteria for each student.

Along with the norms prescribed by the aforementioned acts and regulations, there are certain criteria proposed by various Croatian authors and experts which should be met in order for integration of HI students to be successful. Bakota and Čilić Burušić (2014) state that schools should cooperate with the school physician; they should accustom HI students and their parents to the new environment; as well as prepare HI students' peers to their arrival. As far as teachers of HI students are concerned, they should all be familiarized with various aspects of HI students' background: the institution where students were previously educated in; the institution where students attended rehabilitation and its progress; the level of hearing loss; students' cognitive and linguistic skills; students' difficulties and competences; the relationship students have with their parents; and the quality of encouragement students' receive in their everyday lives (Bakota & Čilić Burušić, 2014; Ivasović & Andrijević Gajić, 2008). Ivasović and Andrijević Gajić (2008) emphasize the importance of teachers being motivated, enthusiastic, and ready to implement new and creative teaching methods in class.

Furthermore, school principals are supposed to organize professional education for teachers of HI students (Bakota & Čilić Burušić, 2014). This education should be comprised of

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<sup>4</sup> cro. *Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard za engleski jezik - HNOS*

theoretical knowledge of the student's difficulty, new educational approaches and strategies used in the process of integration, and support in the implementation of the subject syllabus. The classes and workshops for teachers should be held by a team of experts (cro. *mobilni stručni tim*) in cooperation with the Education and Teacher Training Agency (Dulčić et al., 2012). Also, teachers can have training in specialized institutions as well, where they can attend demonstrations of various rehabilitation and educational practices.

Ivasović and Andrijević Gajić (2008) state that during classes HI students should be assisted by a paraprofessional specialized in working with HI children. The paraprofessional is supposed to help students prepare for every class and exam, help them activate their prior knowledge, assist in taking notes, deal with any issues related to hearing aids, etc. They should also assist teachers in the preparation of an individualized syllabus and in assessing and tracking learner's progress. As for the learners who communicate via sign language; they are entitled to a sign language interpreter, who is not supposed to help them with the subject matter, but serves as a translator for both the student and the teacher.

Moreover, Ivasović and Andrijević Gajić (2008) state that all HI children are entitled to an FM device – an assistive listening device that consists of a microphone transmitter used by the teacher and a receiver used by the learner. It helps learners understand speech in noisy environments and across a greater distance. Dulčić et al. (2012) mention that several research studies showed that HI learners, after a year of using the device, performed better than those who did not.

Although children with hearing impairments, as well as children with other difficulties, are educated in both mainstream schools and special educational institutions, segregation in educational system has been under scrutiny since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Dulčić and Kondić, 2002, as cited in Jelovac, 2017). Accordingly, in 1980s, children with difficulties started to be integrated into regular schools and this has since been the norm in Croatian educational system (Dulčić et al., 2012). However, there are certain specialized institutions in Croatia that have proven to be successful in rehabilitation and education of HI learners, such as SUVAG Polyclinic and Slava Raškaj Center. Both institutions follow an individualized approach based on collaborative efforts of teachers, speech pathologists, defectologists, phoneticians, psychologists, and other experts, but differ in methods they use. While Slava Raškaj Center enrolls HI children who do not communicate orally and children with various other difficulties,

SUVAG Polyclinic fosters the use of residual hearing and the development of speech and listening using Petar Guberina's verbotonal method for rehabilitation of HI children and AVGS method for FLL (for more details see Guberina, 2010), with the main goal being successful integration of HI children into mainstream schools and the hearing community.

## ***2.2. Educational policies in other countries***

Analysis of relevant literature and scientific papers provided insight into educational policies and practices of several other European countries.

Piniel, Kontra, and Csizér (2016) give a short overview of the situation in Hungary, where HI children can be educated in both mainstream and special needs schools, as is the case in Croatia. However, the number of HI children in specialized institutions has decreased in recent years, due to more frequent attempts of integration. HI students in regular educational settings are usually exempted from FL classes, but if they decide to attend them, they are provided with various adjustments, such as taking a written instead of an oral exam; having more time to prepare for tests; and receiving help from sign language interpreter if necessary (Kárpáti, 2002; as cited in Bajko and Kontra 2008). As far as the specialized institutions are concerned, FL education starts in grade 5. The curriculum is based on auditory-verbal approach and it is up to individual institutions and language teachers to make necessary adjustments for their students. The Hungarian Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing mentions on its web page (<http://sinosz.hu/sinosz-materials-in-english/sign-language/>) that as of September 2017 bilingual education and teaching of Hungarian Sign Language (HSL) is obligatory in specialized institutions for HI children, whereas teaching of HSL in mainstream schools remains optional.

According to Urdarević (2016), educational system in Serbia introduced inclusion in 2009; therefore, education for HI children is organized in both types of educational contexts, too. In Serbia, sign language is recognized as the first language of deaf people. In specialized institutions for HI children different modes of communication are used, such as the oral approach, sign language and finger spelling; and students are provided with additional support that includes sessions with hearing and speech therapists, where they practice articulation and pronunciation in both English and Serbian. HI students can transfer from specialized to

mainstream schools on every level of education and can be exempted from English classes or attend classes according to an individualized curriculum. On the primary level of education, the EFL (English as a foreign language) curriculum is the same for mainstream and specialized schools, but can be adjusted to the individual needs of HI students. In 2009, however, a special EFL curriculum for secondary school HI students was developed and has since been in use. Urdarević (2016) mentions that, based on previous positive experience, participation of HI students in international exchange and online EFL projects, as well as in other types of project-based learning, is highly encouraged.

Whether they attend specialized or mainstream schools, HI students in Norway “have the legal right to choose to be educated in and about sign language and become sign bilingual,” which includes Norwegian Sign Language (NSL) and Norwegian spoken and written language (Pritchard, 2016, p. 42). The teaching of English starts in grade 1 and the aim of the curriculum for HI children is “to achieve age-appropriate English literacy and independent face-to-face communication”, as well as to gain “cultural knowledge of English-speaking deaf culture” (p. 43). Policy-makers are aware of the heterogeneity of this group; therefore, the English curriculum tries to cater for every student’s individual needs with the main goal being for students “to communicate independently in one English modality or another, without using a sign language interpreter” (p. 43). Thus, students are offered to choose between several modes of communication: British Sign Language (BSL), American Sign Language (ASL), Signed English<sup>5</sup>, English speech, “chatting” using ICT (Information and Communication Technology), or a mixture of these modalities. The introduction of BSL into the English language syllabus was proven to be successful by a study conducted on all Norwegian deaf 4<sup>th</sup> graders, who after four years of learning BSL performed better than their British and Swedish deaf peers (Pritchard, 2013). It is important to mention that these students had access to sign language from an early age, given that the parents of HI children in Norway are offered sign language courses immediately after the hearing loss diagnosis. As far as teacher education is concerned, Pritchard (2016) mentions that there are BSL courses for teachers organized regularly, but whether they receive any other type of special needs education remains unclear.

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<sup>5</sup> „Signed English is an artificially constructed use of signs to visualize English sentence structure“ (Pritchard, 2016, p. 43).

Schools in Sweden also offer their HI students to learn English through BSL or ASL (Bedoin, 2011) and Dotter (2008) mentions that most Scandinavian countries follow the same principles.

### ***2.3. Contemporary tendencies in SLA and ELT with regard to HI learners***

One of the most important features of current educational tendencies is that they aim at providing equal educational opportunities for all children, which includes providing HI children with foreign language learning opportunities.

Among the first things to consider when discussing SLA is the learners' first language (L1) and its relationship to their second or foreign language (L2) learning. Since L2 is learned after L1 has already been acquired, L1 plays an important role in the acquisition of L2 (Saville-Troike, 2006). It provides the knowledge of how language works and, together with the world knowledge a child gains through cognitive development and L1 usage, acts as a solid foundation for L2 acquisition. It is obvious, therefore, that the process of SLA in HI children, due to their hearing loss and limited knowledge of L1, is hindered from the very beginning.

Unfortunately, this is not the only issue related to the HI people's L1. It has become necessary to distinguish between the two groups of HI persons – the hard-of-hearing persons who communicate orally, and identify themselves with the hearing community and the deaf persons who communicate in sign language, consider it as their L1 and identify themselves as culturally Deaf (Baker, 2006). Since the latter are a minority within the HI community, the importance of differentiating between different language needs of the two groups is often ignored (Dotter, 2004, as cited in Marsh, 2005). The fact that the sign language deaf people use is considered to be their L1 (although in many countries this is not officially acknowledged), the national (usually written) language is their L2, and the English language they learn in formal educational context is actually their third language (L3), sets forth different implications for both ELT and ELL. Thus, this issue has been given more attention in the ELT profession in the last decade (Bedoin, 2011; Dotter, 2004, as cited in Marsh, 2005; Dotter, 2008; Fuchs, 2004, as cited in Marsh, 2005).

Due to the above described circumstances, it has long been debated whether children with hearing impairments are capable of acquiring L2 or whether the acquisition of L2 would hinder the development of language skills in their L1. However, in recent years, various

research studies have provided evidence that not only are HI children able to attain high levels of proficiency in a foreign language (Piniel et al. 2016; Waltzman et al., 2003, as cited in Jelovac, 2017), but also that learning another language improves language skills in their L1 as well<sup>6</sup> (Bedoin, 2011; Guiberson, 2014, as cited in Jelovac, 2017; Urdarević, 2016). Therefore, the fact that HI people are able to learn foreign languages is not questionable anymore, but further research is necessary to differentiate between the distinctive educational needs of the two groups of HI learners. In the meantime, it is important for the language teaching community to focus on adapting modes of communication, teaching practices and learning goals in the existing conditions.

As far as modes of communication are concerned, HI learners can be taught in the oral and/or visual mode, i.e. sign language. Hard-of-hearing learners who communicate orally are usually taught English in the oral mode in order to develop their speaking and listening skills as well. For deaf sign users, a logical choice would be to use sign language in English classes. Unfortunately, due to lack of proper methodology and educated teachers, in many countries this is not the case. Fuchs (2004, as cited in Marsh, 2005) and Pritchard (2013) emphasize the importance of introducing ASL and BSL as a starting point for learning English, since it would provide learners “with the opportunity to compare two Sign Languages, thereby developing metalinguistic skills that can be useful in the construction of language and FLL” (Pritchard, 2013, p. 119). Ideally, all HI learners should have the opportunity to choose between various modes of communication since in their everyday lives they will have to interact with hearing persons and HI persons that use different modes of communication, in both L1 and L2.

Certain contemporary ELT practices, such as developing learner autonomy, developing learner’s metacognitive strategies, encouraging small group work and teaching as ‘interaction’, etc. (for more details see Ellis & Shintani, 2014), should be reconsidered when it comes to HI learners, especially when employed in mainstream educational settings. Due to constant assistance throughout the educational and rehabilitation processes, HI learners might find it hard to independently engage in the learning process. Also, the idea that group work fosters independence and provides ample opportunity for talking in L2 (Ellis & Shintani, 2014) comes into question in the context of HI learners. More precisely, due to the difficulties in oral communication and the background noise present in the classroom, they struggle to participate in group work activities in the same way as their hearing peers. However, this does not mean

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<sup>6</sup> This can be explained in terms of crosslinguistic influence, i.e. the fact that in the process of learning L2, the two languages can influence each other (Ellis & Shintani, 2014).

such practices should be withheld from HI learners, but they should be carefully thought over before implementation into English classes.

Finally, the main objective of teaching English to HI learners should be the development of language skills according to the individual communicative needs of these learners. In order to accomplish that, it is vital to recognize that it is an extremely heterogeneous group and that one teaching method or approach is highly unlikely to work with all HI learners. Therefore, in the context of HI learners, it is even more relevant to follow the principle of the Council of Europe (2001) that states the following: "...the methods to be employed in language teaching, learning and research are those considered to be most effective in reaching the objectives agreed in the light of the needs of the individual learners in their social context" (p. 142).

#### ***2.4. Cognitive and linguistic skills of HI children***

Due to great differences in the level of hearing loss and competences among HI children, having teachers that are aware of the effective teaching methods is much more important than the type of school HI children are being educated in (Marschark & Knoors, 2012). In order for teachers to learn necessary pedagogical and didactic strategies, it is crucial that they understand the underlying concepts of hearing loss. If teachers want to choose appropriate teaching methods, they have to understand the differences in cognitive functioning between hearing and HI children. This is far more important than simply being aware of the level of hearing loss, since even children with mild hearing loss experience difficulties in communication and learning (Marschark & Knoors, 2012). For this reason, in this section we will first provide an overview of research on cognitive and linguistic skills of HI children that are likely to cause difficulties for teachers during classes.

There is a common misconception that HI people see better than those who can hear, so they are often considered to be 'visual learners'. However, research has shown that there is no difference in visual perception between deaf and hearing individuals (Marschark and Wauters, 2011; as cited in Marschark and Knoors, 2012). Dye, Hauser, and Bavelier (2008) stress that, the only relevant difference between HI and hearing people concerning vision is that HI individuals seem to be more sensitive to peripheral visual stimuli. This means that HI individuals focus more on the peripheral locations of the visual field, as opposed to hearing



individuals who pay more attention to the center of the visual field. Dye et al. (2008) explain this phenomenon as a compensation “for the lack of peripheral auditory cues provided by the environment, such as the sound of an approaching vehicle or the creak of an opening door” (p. 256). Although this ability helps them notice events they would not otherwise be able to notice through hearing, it might pose problems for HI learners in the classroom since too many visual stimuli might distract them more than hearing learners (Dye et al., 2008).

In addition, the problem arises while presenting the information during the lesson, whether through spoken or sign language, since teachers have to slow down the pace of their teaching in order to enable HI learners to focus on visual aids, such as slides, flashcards, etc. However, in the heat of the moment teachers might forget to provide the extra time, or, on the other hand, if they do slow down, less subject matter is covered. Obviously, adjusting each lesson to the individual needs of the learners and at the same time trying to cover everything in the syllabus is very stressful and challenging for the teachers.

Another challenge teachers might face in the teaching process is the way in which differences in short- and long-term memory between HI and hearing learners affect learning (Marschark and Knoors, 2012). The most obvious consequence of the above-mentioned differences is HI students’ vocabulary repertoire. Their vocabulary acquisition is hindered largely due to difficulties on phonological, morphological, semantic, and pragmatic level, all of which affect their narrative skills as well (Kelić, 2014). Moreover, HI students have a hard time remembering sequences (Marschark and Knoors, 2012) and have difficulties with concept categorization (Marschark and Knoors, 2012; Kelić, 2014), both of which are important aspects of vocabulary acquisition and learning in general. What is more, different knowledge organization in HI children’s long-term memory also slows down the acquisition of vocabulary. It has been found that HI children use their prior knowledge less often than hearing children due to weaker connections between lexical concepts in memory (McEvoy et al., 1999; as cited in Marschark and Knoors, 2012). Therefore, in order to illustrate relations among concepts, Marschark and Knoors (2012) suggest teachers should use strategies such as concept maps and diagrams, as well as games and other activities usually used with young learners. Also, they should not always expect HI learners to make inferences by themselves, but rather help them to connect new information with prior knowledge, as well as provide sufficient repetition. In order to successfully implement these strategies, teachers should be familiar with their learners’ knowledge and be able to assess it in advance.

Poor speech intelligibility of HI learners may be one more obstacle in English language classes since it impedes communication with the teacher and hearing peers. Moritz (2016) found that, due to certain segmental (consonant substitution, omission and devoicing; vowel neutralization) and supra-segmental (monotonous intonation and slow speech rate) deviations, English speech production of French HI learners was considered to be very poor and difficult to understand. Therefore, she suggests that understanding segmental and supra-segmental aspects of HI learners' speech could help teachers adapt their teaching methods and facilitate integration in foreign language classes, and suggests that phoneticians should play an important role in this aspect of teacher training.

Furthermore, an important aspect of every student's learning process is the ability to recognize when something has been learned and understood and the ability to self-monitor one's own progress in language learning. This metacognitive level of thinking has been found to be less developed in HI children (Marschark & Knoors, 2012), That is so partly due to poor linguistic skills, which have been shown to be crucial for the development of metacognition (Hauser et al., 2008; as cited in Marschark and Knoors, 2012). Another factor that slows down the progress of metacognitive skills is the fact that HI children rely much more on the help and assistance of others – they do not solve problems for themselves and are prone to giving up easily. In order to develop metacognition, HI children should learn to deal with academic (and other) challenges on their own as often as possible.

Marschark and Knoors (2012) emphasize that, due to underdeveloped metacognition in HI learners, the aforementioned strategies, such as concept maps and diagrams, as well as scaffolding<sup>7</sup>, are only useful if students understand their purpose and can actively use them. Under no circumstances should teachers assume that merely using those strategies is enough. They also state that, for the same reason, teachers should never assume their HI students fully grasped the subject matter, but should rather frequently check for comprehension.

Since it has been shown that HI students might be at a disadvantage in environments where teachers are unfamiliar with HI students' knowledge organization (Marschark & Knoors, 2012), it is vital to educate teachers so they could fully understand delays in linguistic, cognitive

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<sup>7</sup>Saville-Troike (2006) defines scaffolding as “verbal guidance which an expert provides to help a learner perform any specific task, or the verbal collaboration of peers to perform a task which would be too difficult for any one of them individually” (p. 112, 113).

and metacognitive functioning of HI children and adjust their instructional strategies accordingly. Moreover, Marschark and Knoors (2012) recommend teachers be acquainted with the HI learners' strengths and needs as well. For example, teachers should be informed about the characteristics of HI learners' visuospatial functioning and learn how to adapt the classroom environment to their visual needs and take advantage of their visual strengths.

### ***2.5. Recent research – findings and methodology***

In recent years, more attention has been given to HI learners of English and to improvement of their educational rights, which in turn has provided a deeper insight into difficulties they face during schooling. However, due to heterogeneity of this group and different educational contexts of these learners, this is just the tip of the iceberg and a lot more needs to be done. On the other hand, qualitative research that could help us gain better understanding of struggles teachers have while teaching English to the hearing-impaired is, unfortunately, quite scarce. For this reason, it is difficult sometimes to find useful solutions and implement proper policies that could enhance the teaching and learning of English to HI persons. This section will provide an overview of several research studies that included the teachers' perspectives, thus contributing to a more in-depth analysis of this issue. Due to the fact that research on this topic in Croatia is limited so far, besides the conclusions, a certain amount of attention will be given to methodology utilized in the studies as well, in order to show successful research practices and provide ideas for future research.

Given that HI learners have often been exempted from English classes in schools, many of them started learning English as adults. This is why, in 2005, Bajko and Kontra (2008) carried out a research study at a private language school in Hungary with five HI adult learners of English and their teacher. All of the learners were either deaf or had a severe hearing loss; all communicated via sign language and considered HSL their L1; and all but one had a very good command of Hungarian vocabulary and grammar. The teacher was in her twenties, had a teaching degree in English but no qualifications for or experience with teaching learners with SEN. She voluntarily completed an HSL course at an intermediate level to prepare for teaching this group.

The researchers took a qualitative approach and used mixed methods of data collection. The research started with lesson observations during which the researchers used an observation

sheet to record the frequency and purpose of sign language usage. The first two lessons observed were used to design and try out the instrument while the notes from the remaining seven visits were used in the analysis. In the second part of the research, the authors distributed a questionnaire in Hungarian to the learners in order to investigate their beliefs, motivation and learning styles and strategies. A six-point Likert scale was used in sections on learner beliefs and motivation, while a checklist of statements was used for learning types and strategies. The authors pointed out that the rationale for using the questionnaire was to avoid any communication barriers between the researcher and the participants, to reduce the time of data gathering and to avoid the participants' answers being influenced by the researcher's presence. The next phase of the research included student and teacher interviews. The student interviews were audio-recorded, lasted from 20 to 30 minutes and an interpreter was used to translate the interview questions into HSL and students' answers into Hungarian. The interview guide was semi-structured and comprised of 20 open-ended questions that looked into background information; use of sign language in class; students' opinion about the ideal group structure and course material; and views on the English language and learning English. There were two teacher interviews; both were audio-recorded and lasted about 60 minutes. The first was semi-structured and consisted of 19 questions that investigated biographical information; personal experience in teaching English to HI learners; teaching methods; and future plans for the group. In the second interview, the teacher presented the materials she used for this particular group of learners. The data were analyzed by using different methods – the data gathered during observations, as well as the checklist items of the questionnaire, were analyzed by calculating frequencies; the Likert-scale items of the questionnaire were analyzed by calculating means; whereas the interviews were first transcribed and then subjected to content analysis. The researchers followed the standards of qualitative research and organized their study in a cyclical manner so that the observations guided the making of the questionnaire, and the findings from both the observations and the questionnaires influenced the choice of interview questions.

The researchers found that the participants' beliefs, learning strategies, and motivation did not differ much from those of hearing learners. They concluded that the slight differences they did observe, such as considering reading and writing in English easier than speaking and listening, could be ascribed to the participants' hearing impairments.

The interview results showed that the teacher, as well as the learners, found the use of HSL during classes extremely beneficial. The learners stated that with the help of sign language they could lip-read and understand the pronunciation more easily, that their overall progress was faster and lessons much more interesting. Since the teacher had visited several English

lessons at a school for HI students where HSL was not used and had been disappointed by what she had seen, she concurred with her students' views and added that HSL helped her to understand better what they were saying in English and to establish a closer rapport with the students.

As far as the group structure is concerned, the teacher and the students agreed that non-integrated, smaller groups (i.e. learning with other deaf students rather than in mixed groups with hard-of-hearing and/or hearing students) are a better working environment for severely deaf students whose L1 is sign language. They mentioned several challenges they would otherwise have to deal with, such as not having enough input from the oral communication happening during classes; not being able to understand hearing or hard-of-hearing students' utterances without translation to sign language; and consequently, becoming bored and losing interest.

With regard to teaching materials, the students were dissatisfied with the course book and did not consider it suitable for their needs. Therefore, the teacher needed to use her creativity to adapt course book tasks (e.g. replacing listening tasks with a lip-reading practice) and create extra materials, such as picture dictionaries, storybooks and grammar worksheets. She also implemented activities that are often used with young learners, such as colored word-cards, guessing games and activities that involved touching or manipulating objects, since she realized that active participation is much more effective way of learning for HI students. This is in line with Marschark and Knoors' (2012) recommendations on which activities to use with HI learners.

It is interesting to note that all the adjustments of teaching methods and materials made by the teacher were not explicitly depicted as challenges, but rather as examples of successful attempts to improve learning experience for deaf learners. The authors concluded that it is necessary for teachers to be proficient in sign language and to understand differences between visual and oral languages. They also recommended course books to be adapted to take into account specific learning differences of deaf learners.

Bedoin (2011) investigated the teaching process in mainstream schools in France, where at the time of the research inclusion was encouraged and more and more HI learners were integrated into mainstream schools. English was a compulsory subject in secondary schools for both the hearing and HI students and the learning goals for the latter focused on enabling them to communicate in written and/or spoken English. The research was carried out in several secondary schools in both specialized and mainstream settings in order to show why teaching

English to HI learners in France is important; what teachers have to deal with while teaching English to HI learners; and in what ways teacher training programs could be improved. The data were gathered via survey questionnaires (to analyze teacher and student profiles), twelve semi-structured teacher interviews (to look into pedagogical objectives in class, the adaptation of teaching materials and the choice and use of different languages in class) and 68 classroom observations with seven of the English teachers interviewed (to analyze classroom teaching practices).

The main challenge the teachers were faced with was to adapt their teaching methods to their students' individual needs and at the same time follow the syllabus. Their efforts were additionally hampered by the lack of proper education. Teachers who worked in specialized institutions were usually required to hold a degree in SEN; however, only a few of the teachers in mainstream schools held a degree in both fields. Consequently, most of the teachers had to learn along the way how to teach HI learners and what difficulties they experience. Some of the teachers even admitted they had had stereotypical beliefs before they started working with HI learners and thought they cannot learn foreign languages, whereas some thought learning English is not a priority for this group of learners and lowered their expectations.

With regard to activities and methods, the teachers reported they found it very difficult to follow the principles of communicative approach. For example, they struggled with finding appropriate activities and materials to replace speaking activities from the textbooks. Also, they stated it was virtually impossible to use only English in the classes since it was extremely difficult for HI learners, so they mostly used French. Furthermore, the researcher noticed teachers utilized two strategies concerning the development of the four language skills. When teaching students with profound hearing loss who communicated in sign language, teachers could only focus on developing reading and writing skills, whereas with students who were able to communicate orally, they aimed at developing their speaking and listening skills as well.

Finally, the author suggested that teacher training programs should incorporate lessons on deaf culture in general and on deaf cultures from the English speaking countries, as well as French and American Sign Language courses.

In a similar vein to the 2005 research, but several years later, Piniel et al. (2016) decided to investigate the situation of HI FL learners in specialized institutions in Hungary since as of 2011 the teaching of foreign languages is obligatory in these schools. In the book *English as a Foreign Language for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Persons: Challenges and Strategies*, edited by Domagala-Zyśk and Kontra (2016), they presented the results obtained from semi-structured

interviews conducted with ten teachers (one German and nine English language teachers), a section head, and seven principals or vice principals. The aim was to explore learning goals, challenges and successes of FL teaching to HI learners in special needs schools. The interviews were part of a 3-year (2012-2014) research project that included classroom observations, questionnaires distributed to HI learners and interviews with learners. The interviews were audio-recorded, the recordings transcribed, and the transcripts analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA.

As far as language learning goals are concerned, the participants stated that the main goal was to enable students to attain a basic level of language proficiency (some teachers mentioned A1 level of language proficiency as a reference point), so that they could independently communicate in everyday situations (e.g. while traveling abroad), with the focus being on written communication. Other goals mentioned included learning about other cultures, taking final examination, developing general intelligence, improving memorization skills and enhancing learner autonomy.

However, there were a few challenges teachers had to deal with in order to achieve those goals. The biggest and most frequently mentioned obstacle was the lack of materials available for teachers. Due to inadequate textbooks, they had to spend a lot of time and energy to find or create learning materials that would be appropriate for their HI learners. The researchers, as well as the teachers interviewed, noted that this was part of a much bigger problem, namely the lack of the methodology for teaching foreign languages to HI learners, which is why teachers often had to come up with their own teaching methods. The teachers suggested the methodology for this particular group of learners should focus on the introduction of subject matter at a slower rate with a lot of repetition, in order to help HI learners to overcome memory difficulties they experience.

Another barrier teachers mentioned is the issue of communication. Since the classes were held mostly in spoken and written Hungarian, which most of the students could not follow very well, the teachers expressed the need for learning HSL. Also, they felt that having advanced technology in the classrooms, such as interactive whiteboards, would save them a lot of time they lost while drawing and writing on the blackboard and would greatly improve communication with HI learners. Although some of the schools had installed interactive whiteboards, they failed to provide any kind of training courses on how to use these devices or on how to integrate them into language teaching methodology.

Furthermore, the teachers reported feeling very isolated and having no opportunity to share their ideas and problems with other teachers of HI learners since they were usually the only teachers of English in their schools.

In addition to these obstacles, the teachers had to cope with the lack of proper education, as well. Only three of the ten teachers interviewed had a degree in both foreign language teaching (FLT) and SEN and felt much more prepared than those who had only one of the degrees. The researchers concluded that the two essential prerequisites for teaching HI learners include holding a degree in SEN and being fluent in HSL, and recommended policy-makers to bear in mind the teachers' needs when creating curricula and teaching materials.

Tomić, Posedi, and Geld (2017) conducted a focus-group interview with nine foreign language teachers, followed by two semi-structured interviews, in order to obtain a better insight into the state of affairs in Croatia in the context of FLT and HI learners. All participants worked in a primary school with many years of experience in integrating children with hearing impairments and other speech and language disorders into regular classes. The topics covered were various: the number of integrated students and types of disabilities they had; the benefits of inclusion for students without disabilities; the challenges teachers faced during lessons; the teachers' satisfaction with available support; and teacher education. The results of the qualitative study were used to develop a more detailed questionnaire that will be used on a large sample at a national level and provide reliable details on the relevant questions pertaining to teaching learners with disabilities.

Some of the challenges teachers mentioned were the duration of the diagnostic process, which was often too long, and a not very clear difference between individualized and adjusted programs learners are assigned by the expert associates after the diagnosis. Also, they stated that there were often several integrated learners per class who followed different programs, which made it very difficult to plan and conduct lessons and adapt materials. Therefore, teachers often had to rely on their personal judgment and experience, which was very hard due to the lack of proper education.

The participants agreed that parental involvement is crucial for successful integration of children with disabilities. However, parents were often not ready to accept neither the existence of a disability nor the advice from expert associates.

They stated that students mainly had difficulties with poor L1 vocabulary, low metalinguistic awareness, and difficulties on phonological and semantic level. Because of that, teachers developed certain teaching strategies, such as text shortening, simplification of



sentence structure and drawing attention to important information in the texts. Consequently, lesson planning had to be done in a more detailed and prudent manner. They had to adapt assessment methods as well, and stated that grades served more as an incentive for learners and an indicator of their progress, rather than an indicator of their actual knowledge.

However, despite the challenges they are faced with on a daily basis, the participants state that integration of children with disabilities is a practice that fosters tolerance and cooperation and because of that should be further improved.

To summarize, this short overview has shown that over the years and in different countries English teachers of HI learners have been dealing with similar challenges. The main problem they have been facing is non-existent methodology, which causes difficulties in adaptation of teaching materials and communication with HI learners. This is exacerbated by the lack of proper teacher training in the SEN field. However, it seems that teachers instinctively applied some of the methods and activities that experts recommend in order to overcome those barriers and remained positive and enthusiastic about teaching HI learners.

### **3. Study**

#### ***3.1. Aim***

Due to a greater emphasis being put on equal learning opportunities in the educational system, there is a growing number of HI students learning foreign languages, especially English. Given that there is limited research in the field of adapting teaching methods and materials to the special needs of these learners, there is a need to investigate current teaching practices and find ways to improve them so HI students could fully benefit from English classes. We believed it would be best to start by taking into account the experiences of teachers who had been teaching or who used to teach HI learners. Thus, this exploratory study aimed at answering the following question:

What challenges do teachers in Croatia face when teaching English to HI students?

In order to address this issue in a more detailed manner, we aimed at establishing the challenges in the following areas of FLT, which were found to be the most salient in the literature review:

- teacher education
- working conditions and staff cooperation
- teachers' attitudes towards the integration of HI students
- communication issues in the classroom
- learning outcomes and assessment
- teaching materials and activities
- HI students' attitudes towards and motivation for learning English.

Hopefully, providing answers to this question will help to determine possible guidelines for future research and point it to more specific directions.

#### ***3.2. Procedure***

In order to gain better understanding of the problems and needs of the teachers, a qualitative approach as described by Creswell (2009) was found to be the most suitable for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with 6 English teachers in four mainstream elementary schools and one secondary school in Zagreb, the latter being a specialized institution for children with SEN. After consent had been obtained from the school principals to conduct interviews on the school premises, the teachers were contacted to arrange the time of the meeting. All participants, as well as the school principals, were presented with

an official description of the study aims and methodology and were informed that the results would be presented anonymously. The interviews were carried out by the author of this work in May 2017 in quiet classrooms or staff rooms of the schools and lasted approximately 50 minutes each. They were audio-recorded and transcribed prior to data analysis. The data were obtained and analyzed using the directed approach (Shannon & Hsieh, 2005), meaning the research began by determining conceptual categories based on the literature review and prior research, which were used to create interview questions. After going through all the data several times to get the gist, a detailed analysis that involved manual coding was done in order to identify themes within the predetermined categories. The categories and the discovered themes are used to organize and present the results.

### ***3.3. Instrument***

The semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix) consisted of 47 open-ended questions organized in eight categories based on the aforementioned areas of interest. The first category, *teacher training and teaching experience*, elicited information on the participants' teaching qualifications and experience, as well as professional development in the field of teaching HI learners. The second category, *working conditions and staff cooperation*, looked into institutional factors that might have had an influence on the teaching process, such as the number of HI students per class; any issues the teachers experienced related to hearing devices; teachers' cooperation with parents and paraprofessionals; and support services available for the teachers. Next, *teachers' attitudes towards the integration of HI learners* were investigated, with regard to its effects on both hearing and HI learners. The following category referred to any *communication issues in the classroom* and ways of overcoming them, including the use of Croatian and Croatian sign language during lessons. The fifth category encompassed issues related to *learning outcomes and assessment*, such as difficulties with syllabus design; satisfaction with the official guidelines on learning outcomes and assessment criteria; and challenges related to the development of language skills. The next category dealt with obstacles related to *teaching materials and activities*, more precisely, their adaptation to the needs of HI learners, as well as with challenges related to lesson planning. Furthermore, *HI learners' attitudes towards and motivation for learning English* and their effects on lesson realization were investigated. Finally, several questions were grouped into a closing section where teachers were asked to reflect on their past experience in teaching HI learners and to give recommendations for possible improvements in this field.

The open-ended question format was chosen as the most suitable for this type of study since it allowed for a more in-depth discussion and enabled the participants to freely express their views and opinions. When their answers strayed from the questions or they started to digress, the interviewer did not interrupt them, but rather asked follow-up questions after they had finished to bring the focus back to the main question. Certain follow-up questions were planned in advance (and presented in italics in the interview guide) so they could be used when participants gave vague answers or when more specific pieces of information were needed, for instance, in question 28:

Na koji način sastavljate nastavni plan za učenike sa sl. oštećenjima koji ne rade po redovnom programu i na koje prepreke nailazite? (*Koje upute dobivate? Pomažu li Vam stručni suradnici ili ga sastavljate sami?*)

[How do you design the syllabus for HI students who do not follow the regular curriculum? (*Do you get any guidelines? Do you receive help from the expert associates or you design it by yourself?*)]

However, when a participant mentioned something the interviewer was unfamiliar with, improvised probe questions were asked for further clarification, e.g. *Could you give me an example? What do you mean by that?*, etc.

Moreover, the semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to change the order of the questions when it was necessary, or to skip a certain question if the participant had already provided the answer in a previous question. The interviewer avoided leading the participants in their answers throughout each interview. Each participant willingly provided answers to every question and seemed happy to honestly discuss issues raised in the interview.

### **3.4. Participants**

All participants in the study were female. All but one worked only in mainstream schools; however, the teacher that worked in a specialized institution used to work in mainstream schools as well. Two teachers worked in a mainstream elementary school which has a long tradition of integrating HI learners and learners with speech and language difficulties and which provides those learners with a prolonged professional treatment program led by experts from the SUVAG Polyclinic. Five teachers held a master's degree in English language teaching, whereas one teacher held a master's degree in Primary Education with intensified English language program. None of them had any SEN qualifications, but some of them attended certain SEN workshops, which will be further discussed in the next chapter. The sample of the study encompassed

several levels of schooling, since the participants worked in lower primary<sup>8</sup>, upper primary<sup>9</sup>, and secondary<sup>10</sup> schools. Teaching experience ranged from 5 to 24 years, whereas years of experience in teaching HI learners ranged from 2 to 21. Only one of the teachers did not have any HI students at the time of the study. The overall number of HI students taught by the teachers ranged from 1 to around 40, while one of the teachers could not specify the exact number since she had been working with HI students for more than 21 years and taught several HI students each year. Only two teachers knew sign language at a beginner level, one of them teaching in the specialized institution where HI learners communicated only via sign language. A more detailed description of the teachers' professional background can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Professional background of the participants.

	Type of institution	Teaching qualifications	Years of teaching experience	Years of experience in teaching HI learners	School level	Current number of HI students	Overall number of HI students	Sign language proficiency
<b>Teacher n°1 (T1)</b>	Mainstream	M.A. in English and Archive Sciences	5	3	upper primary	none	2	yes
<b>Teacher n°2 (T2)</b>	Mainstream	M.A. in English and Comparative Literature	24	21	lower primary	2	large number, could not specify	no
<b>Teacher n°3 (T3)</b>	Mainstream	M.A. in English	11	3	lower and upper primary	1	1	no
<b>Teacher n°4 (T4)</b>	Mainstream	M.A. in Primary Education	10	4	lower and upper primary	1	1	no
<b>Teacher n°5 (T5)</b>	Specialized	M.A. in English and French	> 10	6	secondary	6	30-40	yes
<b>Teacher n°6 (T6)</b>	Mainstream	M.A. in English	8	2	upper primary	1	1	no

<sup>8</sup> Grades 1-4, 7-10 years of age

<sup>9</sup> Grades 5-8, 11-14 years of age

<sup>10</sup> Grades 1-3/4, 15-17/18 years of age

### ***3.5. Results and discussion***

The results will be presented in the predetermined categories, but since many aspects of teaching English to HI learners are connected and influence each other, certain themes will be discussed in more than one category.

#### ***3.5.1. Teacher training and teaching experience***

Apart from the information on professional background and teaching experience described in the previous section, the first category of questions provides information on professional development and training in the field of hearing impairments and other developmental difficulties.

All teachers emphasize that during their studies, they did not have any courses on teaching children with SEN, and it seems that the situation did not improve after they had started working either. Only three teachers from two different schools report they have attended workshops on teaching HI learners, whereas the other three participants have not had the opportunity to attend any kind of training related to HI learners. T1 and T2, who work in the same school, participated in a project that was held in the SUVAG Polyclinic. They attended lectures and visited classes in the SUVAG Elementary School where they gained insight into practices and strategies used by the experienced teachers of HI learners. It is important to note that T1 received this training only after she had already taught the two HI learners, while T2 participated in this project after roughly 20 years of working with HI learners and had not received any training prior to that. T5 says she attended lectures on working with HI children organized by both the school and the SUVAG Polyclinic, as well as one demonstration class in the SUVAG Elementary School. Also, she attended a beginner Croatian Sign Language course organized by the school for all the teachers working there. The classes were held during one school year only and she expresses the need to further improve her sign language skills.

All participants mention that, as part of their continuous professional development, they are obliged to attend county expert panels every year, as well as lectures organized on the school premises; however, this training has rarely included lectures on teaching children with difficulties, especially with hearing impairments. Teachers who did attend certain lectures on teaching children with difficulties other than hearing impairments (such as ADHD, Down

Syndrome, etc.) say they are mostly satisfied with them and that they could implement what they had learnt into their lessons. However, two teachers state that the lectures are often repetitive and focus on theoretical knowledge. This is why T4 emphasizes that workshops organized by certain publishing houses, such as Profil and Oxford, are much more useful to her since they offer practical demonstrations and examples of adapting materials and activities, which can be seen in the following statement:

*Imamo mi razna predavanja, sad smo imali jedno na Učiteljskom vijeću koje je bilo lijepo, ali ne čuješ ništa korisno. Ja znam kakva sve postoje djeca, ali nek mi da netko rješenje što ću sad...Ove od školskih kuća na koje idem, to mi je nešto što mi pomogne. A ovo na županijskim predavanjima i u školi što se organizira je ok, da malo poboljšamo teoriju, ali mi ne pomažu u radu... (T4)*

*[We have plenty of lectures, we just had one at Teachers' Council that was nice, but you don't hear anything useful. I know what types of children there are, but I need solutions...I find the ones organized by publishing houses useful. And the lectures organized at the county panels and at school are good for improving the theoretical knowledge, but they don't help me in my work...]*

In addition, T4 mentions that often neither the school nor the teachers can afford to pay for all the workshops and lectures, so teachers do not attend them as much as they want or need.

Therefore, it is no wonder that the participants consider further education in this area a necessity, for themselves and for English teachers in general, as well. Only one teacher states she does not feel the need for more training since she is soon going to retire. The most frequent reasons for their opinion are non-existent SEN education during their studies and a desire to help their HI students to achieve better results and reach their full potential. Other reasons the teachers mention include doubting the quality of their teaching methods and lacking the time for personal research on hearing impairments.

As far as the education of teachers during their studies is concerned, the OECD report from 2006 showed that teaching studies varied greatly in their programs and that they focused mostly on subject teaching and less on working with different groups of children (OECD, 2006). The participants' answers in this study indicate that not much has changed since. Given that in the last few decades, the diagnostic procedures have improved and the integration of children with difficulties has become an integral part of educational systems, this aspect of teacher training should be given more attention when developing teaching programs. Of course, it is

not reasonable to expect every faculty to provide all future teachers with training on all difficulties there are. Instead, more opportunities for training on specific difficulties is necessary after and throughout teachers' employment. The participants' answers have shown that only two out of five schools in this study have cooperated with an external team of experts, more precisely, the SUVAG Polyclinic. Those two schools have years of experience with teaching HI learners and a long-lasting cooperation with the SUVAG Polyclinic. The three other schools, due to having no experience in teaching HI learners, are in even greater need of professional support, but have not cooperated with any team of experts nor have they organized any kind of education for their teachers. Even the three teachers that have received training, received it after they had already been working with HI learners for several years, or in the case of one teacher, after her entire service. This calls for a better organization and systematization of in-service training, which even T4 recognizes as important and recommends that more training and workshops be obligatory.

In a similar vein to the findings of studies conducted by Bedoin (2011) and Piniel et al. (2016), the participants' answers have shown that the lack of proper education and opportunities for in-service training presents a serious obstacle for teachers. However, it must be noted that certain steps have been made by Education and Teacher Training Agency to educate teachers of English for working with children with disabilities. In 2017, they organized a workshop and published a handbook on means and methods of adapting teaching materials, practices and activities in English classes. Also, in the 2017/2018 school year, as a part of continuous professional development program, the Agency organized an expert panel on working with children with developmental difficulties in mainstream schools. The panel was aimed at only three counties and was held upon request of one or more schools and only if more than 20 teachers and staff members applied. In this case, it was up to the school to take the initiative for organizing the panel, which is not the best way of providing education to teachers who need it most - if not enough teachers showed interest, the teachers who expressed the need for the training might have been deprived of the opportunity to learn more. This shows the need for and the importance of a better and more systematical monitoring of teachers' and students' needs.



### ***3.5.2. Working conditions and staff cooperation***

The participants' answers have shown that the guidelines on the allowed number of students with developmental difficulties per class are not being followed, which has already been reported by Praznik and Valjak (2012). Two teachers mention they have had up to five SEN students in classes of 24 to 27 students, while the guidelines recommend at most three SEN students with a maximum number of 20 students per class.

Three teachers say that a greater number of students in a class with SEN learners affects the tempo and dynamics of the lesson. Because of the SEN students, they have to present the content in a much slower rate, which is extremely difficult in a mixed-ability class.

The two lower primary teachers state that the number of students is not an important factor in their case since their HI students are very successful, have great parental support and either attend therapy sessions at SUVAG Polyclinic or are included in the prolonged professional treatment in the school, where they get help with homework and get prepared for classes.

T5 mentions that the maximum number of students per class in her school is ten and that she usually has one or two HI learners per class. She states that, although an even smaller number of students would be better, there are often more students with the same difficulties, so she manages to adapt the syllabus to their individual needs.

The teachers report having HI students with both hearing aids and cochlear implants, as well as students who do not use any type of hearing devices. None of the teachers have had any experience so far regarding issues with hearing devices during classes - one of them mentions she would not even know what to do if a problem with the hearing device occurred, while the other one states she relies on the paraprofessional to intervene if necessary.

However, an interesting issue has surfaced related to hearing devices. Three teachers mention that there have been instances in which HI students waited for a long time to get their broken hearing devices fixed and since they were not able to wear them, they had trouble paying attention during the lessons and often took advantage of the situation. Moreover, teachers add that the students often forget to put the hearing aids on or refuse to wear them because they feel embarrassed.

As far as the FM device is concerned, only one teacher reports having used it several years ago and she describes it as a positive experience. It seems that although HI students are

entitled to it and it has been proved to be beneficial, the teachers involved in the study do not use it and apart from this one teacher, they do not even know what it is.

Regarding the availability of paraprofessionals, only T3 states that her HI student is provided with one. The teacher is very satisfied with the cooperation between her and the paraprofessional, who is included in the lesson plan preparation, the development and adaptation of the teaching material, oral and written examinations, and helps the student and the teacher to communicate more easily. The teacher even mentions that she is not very concerned about her lack of proper education for working with HI students since she relies so much on the paraprofessional. However, despite the efforts of the paraprofessional and the teacher, they both struggle to help the student achieve any kind of progress and the teacher is very well aware that without the available help, she would not be able to work with that student.

Two extremities seem to appear in teachers' answers on the need for a paraprofessional. On the one hand, there are teachers who feel no need for that kind of help, especially the two teachers (T2 and T4) who work in the lower primary school and whose HI students are very successful. On the other hand, T1 and T3 find the paraprofessional extremely helpful and useful. The opposing views can be easily noticed in the following statements:

*Nije mi potreban, mislim da bi on njoj smetao. (T4)*

*[I don't need one, I think she would find him/her distracting.]*

*Pa, mislim da ne, jedino ako je ne znam kako težak slučaj. Ovima do sada ne, makar oni idu i u taj produženi stručni postupak, jel, i tu rade, tu imaju pomoć... (T2)*

*[Well, I don't think so, unless it's a very difficult case. Up to now, [the HI students] didn't need them, although, they do attend the prolonged professional treatment, so they get the help they need there...]*

*Da, svakako, svakog predmeta. Oni im dosta pomažu. (T1)*

*[Yes, absolutely, for every subject. They help the students a lot.]*

*Koristan je izuzetno, neprocjenjiv. (T3)*

*[[The paraprofessional] is extremely useful, invaluable.]*

T5 considers a paraprofessional necessary only because she is not proficient enough in the Croatian Sign Language, which would mean she and her students would benefit more from a sign interpreter.

Of course, these different views can be explained by the different working conditions of the participants, different capabilities and needs of their HI students and by the support services available for both the teachers and the students. Even the participants are aware of that so they

have provided answers based only on their own experiences and have avoided generalizations. Also, several teachers mention their experience with children with other difficulties (ADHD, Down syndrome, Asperger's syndrome...), when the paraprofessionals were of great help. However, T4 brings up the issue of finances again, stating that several paraprofessionals had to be let go since the school could not afford to pay them. It seems that, as is the case with teachers' education, the students' needs in the mainstream schools are oftentimes pushed aside due to the schools' poor financial situations.

The situation in specialized institutions is apparently not much better. Since the teacher is not proficient enough in the sign language, not providing a sign interpreter is a serious violation of HI students' educational rights.

As for the cooperation with the rest of the school staff, the participants are mostly satisfied with it. The teachers mention they usually discuss about HI students with the expert associates during Class Councils, where they exchange relevant information and useful methods for working with those students. They mention they are encouraged to talk to the expert associates whenever they encounter or are uncertain how to deal with a certain issue. Also, they state that they often get together with class teachers who know their students best and thus can provide useful insight into their behavior or capabilities.

However, there seems to be an issue teachers are not satisfied with and that is the amount of information they get from the expert associates about the HI students' difficulties. Three teachers have mentioned it on different occasions during the interviews. T1 mentions that the lack of information hinders the process of syllabus design (which will be discussed in more detail later in the work) and at one point seems reluctant to specifically state that:

*Ovako, u pravilu ne dobijemo točnu informaciju o kakvoj se teškoći radi. Dobit ćemo informaciju da je riječ o slušno oštećenom djetetu, nećemo dobiti koliki je to postotak sluha, koliko posto još mogu čuti. Ako je riječ o još nekoj poteškoći, nećemo dobiti informaciju o konkretno kakvoj, obzirom da to spada u medicinsku dokumentaciju i zaštićeno je pa se ne smije davati na uvid profesorima. (...) Obzirom da nemamo dov..., ne znamo točno o čemu je riječ, o kojoj poteškoći, onda je vrlo teško sastaviti program, pogotovo ako dijete ne znate. (T1)*

*[Well, we don't usually get the exact information about the difficulty. We will be told that the child is hearing-impaired, but we won't be told about the percentage of the residual hearing. If there is another difficulty involved, we won't be told exactly what it is since it belongs to the medical documentation and is protected so it cannot be shown*

*to the teachers. (...) Since we don't have eno..., we don't know what exactly it's about, which difficulty, it is very difficult to develop a syllabus, especially if you don't know the child. ]*

She adds that the amount of information they get from the SUVAG Elementary School during the transition process is even smaller. T3, whose HI student achieves very poor results, says the following after having been asked whether he has multiple difficulties:

*To ja ne znam, mislim još ima sigurno, mora biti još nekakvo oštećenje, ali ja to ne znam, niti se meni takve informacije daju. (T3)*

*[I don't know that, I mean, there has to be something, there has to be another difficulty, but I don't know that nor do I get that kind of information.]*

T6 had not even been informed that her student had a hearing impairment when she started teaching him:

*Dakle, ja nisam sama primijetila, vidjela sam da je nešto drugačije, ali nisam primijetila dok nisam saznala... (T6)*

*[So, I hadn't noticed on my own, I had seen there was something different, but I hadn't noticed until I found out...]*

Although protecting students' personal and medical information should be of top priority, keeping that kind of data from teachers is not a proper solution. Various regulations in the Croatian educational system state that teachers should approach each student with difficulties individually, especially when developing syllabuses and criteria for assessment, but that is not possible if they are not provided with all the information necessary. Even the aforementioned experts (Bakota & Čilić Burušić, 2014; Dulčić et al., 2012; Ivasović & Andrijević Gajić, 2008) all emphasize the importance of teachers being informed about all the aspects of a student's difficulty, and it seems in the case of teachers from this study, this advice is not being followed.

As far as the cooperation with parents is concerned, the participants provide varied answers. Two teachers (T2 and T5) state they have little to no contact with the parents, who usually communicate with class teachers. Two teachers (T4 and T6) report having positive experiences with their HI students' parents - they discuss about the students' progress with them and exchange advice and information on how to adapt certain activities to them. T4 even mentions that the active involvement of her student's mother has greatly facilitated the integration process. The last two teachers mention they are not pleased with their relationship with the students' parents. T1 states that her two HI students could have achieved better results if they had had better parental support. T3 brings up a very serious issue related to the parental

involvement, stating that the biggest challenge she has been facing is the inappropriate placement of the HI student. Although she, along with the expert associates and other teachers, has realized that the individualized curriculum is not enough of an adjustment for this student and has advised the parents to ask for a different program for their child (i.e. an adjusted curriculum), they keep refusing to do so. This has led to assessment issues (which will be discussed in more details later) and the teacher experiencing feelings of frustration while trying to find balance between adapting to the student's real capabilities and fulfilling the curriculum requirements. Thus, she cannot stick rigidly to the original syllabus and has to depart from it in order to provide better learning opportunities for her HI student. However, it must be noted that even though she believes she can not officially recommend a change of curriculum for her student without the parents' consent, the Regulation on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities (Official Gazette, No. 24/15) states that teachers and expert associates are allowed to suggest a change of curriculum if they consider it necessary.

It looks like there are many different institutional factors that greatly affect the teaching process and are crucial for creating an inclusive setting for HI students. Some of these factors are completely out of teachers' control (such as the school's finances, the number of students per class, the availability of paraprofessionals, and parents' attitudes), while other (such as not receiving necessary information and not using the FM device) interfere with the experts' recommendations and students' educational rights. Moreover, it seems that teachers are either ill-informed about the legal educational guidelines or the regulations are not interpreted and carried out properly. Some of these findings are similar to those of Tomić, Geld, and Posedi (2017), which shows that there is a need for better monitoring of working conditions teachers are faced with in Croatian schools.

### ***3.5.3. Teachers' attitudes towards the integration of HI students***

Four teachers consider the integration into regular schools useful for HI students on both psychological and social level. They state that the students feel accepted, feel equal to the others and gain confidence. Also, they believe that since the grades HI students get in regular schools are a more realistic representation of their knowledge, they have to put more effort into their studying. Consequently, they realize they are able to achieve better results and are more

motivated. T1 mentions that another benefit of the integration into regular schools is that it provides better opportunities for secondary schooling.

In addition, they feel that it is better for HI students to have English in regular classes since they are more exposed to the language in that way, can take part in various activities and can communicate with their peers. T5 has not had any experience with HI students in the regular school she worked at, so she could not state her opinion on this matter.

On the other hand, T3 does not find the integration of her HI student useful at all since he achieves poor results and is not capable of independent language production, which can be seen in the following statement:

*U nastavi stranih jezika, u ovom slučaju, ne vidim apsolutno nikakvu korist. Jer, jako brzo dijete zaboravi, to što nauči, nauči napamet, uz taj poseban način komunikacije koji ima sa svojom asistenticom. Dakle, isključivo u tom kontekstu to funkcionira. (T3)*  
*[In foreign language classes, in this case, I see absolutely no use [of the integration]. The child tends to forget quickly, and the things he manages to learn, he learns by heart with the help of that special way of communication he has with his paraprofessional. So, it functions solely in that context.]*

Furthermore, she states that even though she relies on the paraprofessional, the amount of multitasking during classes is frustrating and exhausting, which is appropriately depicted with her statement: *“I feel like an octopus.”* However, despite her negative feelings and attitudes, she tries her best to adapt to her HI student’s needs and help him make progress, just like the participants who have reported positive attitudes towards the integration of HI students. These findings are similar to what Vermeulen, Denessen, and Knoors (2011) reported in their study on the relationships between teachers’ behavior, beliefs, and emotions in the context of the integration of HI students into mainstream schools. They found that even the teachers with negative beliefs about the integration showed responsive behavior (i.e. they acted responsibly and took into account their students’ needs), just like T3. However, they found that negative emotions and beliefs occurred as a result of experiencing problems with the integration of HI students and their academic progress. Vermeulen et al. (2011) stated that the development of negative feelings and emotions might lead to low levels of enjoyment in the teaching process, which can be noticed in the statements made by T3. Therefore, the authors recommended teachers have access to better support and assistance in dealing with problems they experience when teaching HI students.

As far as the students without difficulties are concerned, the teachers believe they benefit from the integration as well. They become more tolerant, patient, and considerate and enjoy helping HI students. T5 states that even her hearing students often learn Croatian sign language during four years of schooling so they could communicate with HI students more easily and help them during lessons. Although, as T1 states, teachers are sometimes less engaged with the rest of the class; a slower pace of teaching and a lot of repetition and explanation, which is necessary when having HI students in class, are beneficial for other students as well. They even get more courageous and start asking more questions.

Regarding the introduction of English at an early age (i.e. in the lower primary school), all teachers consider it an advantage. T3 mentions that the knowledge of English her student possesses is mostly from that period. Interestingly, T1 and T2 have noticed, and later confirmed it with the expert associates from the SUVAG Polyclinic, that young HI learners are often more proficient in English than in Croatian and that learning a second language helps their learning of Croatian. This goes along the lines of previously mentioned research on L1 and L2 interference and proves that early second language learning is beneficial even for children with hearing impairments.

Although the sample of this study is rather small to generalize, it seems that the participants' attitudes towards the integration of HI students are more positive than those of the participants from research studies during 1980s, 1990s and 2000s described by Dulčić et al. (2012). This can be explained by the fact that today the integration is a regular part of the educational system and that teachers, other members of the school, and society in general are more familiar with the integration process and various types of disabilities. Therefore, the teachers' attitudes in themselves are not obstacles for the integration process, but the challenges arise when the requirements for successful integration are not fully met.

#### ***3.5.4. Communication issues in the classroom***

In order to facilitate communication during lessons, the participants follow the experts' advice on how to adjust their speech and position in the classroom to the HI students' needs. They keep in mind to speak loudly, slowly, and intelligibly. They provide other type of stimuli simultaneously with speech if necessary, such as visual aids (e.g. flashcards, pictures,

drawings...), gesture, facial expression, and lip-reading and always pay attention to the HI students' feedback. Also, they often simplify their sentences and comprehension questions they ask.

However, T1 points out that it is not always possible to stand at an ideal position for HI students, but when it comes to getting across some important information, she tries to place herself in a position where the HI student can hear and see her clearly.

On the other hand, T3 states that without the paraprofessional she would not be able to communicate with the HI student and that she completely relies on the paraprofessional to bridge the communication gap between her and the HI student. The two of them have a unique way of communication – the paraprofessional additionally explains, retells, and translates utterances in both English and Croatian in various ways during lessons, as well as during oral and written examinations:

*On sam ne može, ne razumije osnovno pitanje. Mislim, ne razumije na hrvatskom što ga pitam. Ja i kad usmeno odgovara učenik, asistentica je pored nas, i ja mu postavim pitanje, jednostavno ga postavim i artikulirano, ali čak i kad je na hrvatskom to pitanje, ona mu ga treba dodatno prepričati...Jednostavno drugačije komuniciraju, ona ima način komunikacije s njim da se njih dvoje razumiju. I ona zapravo uvijek prepričava to što sam ja pitala. Ja ću postaviti pitanje, pa mu ona na papir nekako to skicira, napiše...da se jednostavno on pokuša dosjetiti kako su oni to učili. (T3)*

*[He cannot, he doesn't understand a simple question. I mean, he doesn't understand a question in Croatian. Even during oral examinations, the paraprofessional is sitting next to us, and I ask him a question, a simple question and I speak clearly, but even when that question is in Croatian, she has to further retell it...They just have a different way of communication and can understand each other. And she actually always retells my questions. I ask him a question, and then she makes a sketch on a piece of paper, writes it down...so that he can try to recall the way in which they have studied it.]*

Moreover, the teacher always checks with the paraprofessional how they have studied and revised the lessons so she could formulate questions in the best way for the student to understand them. Even though this might seem as an easy way out for the teacher and as a strategy that hinders the development of the student's independence, the teacher points out that this is the only way to get any kind of response from her student.

T5 states that the biggest obstacle she faces regarding communication is the lack of knowledge in sign language. Since her HI students usually do not speak and communicate only via Croatian sign language, the basic level of knowledge she attained is not enough to engage



in deeper conversations with the students or to explain properly subject matter that is more complex. Therefore, she expresses the need for more sign language courses so her HI students could be on an equal footing with their hearing peers.

Although current trends in EFL promote using L2 during classes as much as possible and keeping the amount of L1 usage to a minimum, all the teachers state that with HI learners they use Croatian much more than with the rest of the class. They mostly use Croatian when giving instructions or introducing new vocabulary. Moreover, three teachers emphasize that they often have to combine English and Croatian with hearing students as well. Although they are aware that this is not what they have been taught at graduate studies, they indicate that in reality it is simply not possible to only use English during classes.

The importance of this issue can be seen in the statement made by T1:

*Ja bih rekla da je to, recimo, bio najveći problem. Ako moram nešto odabrati, mislim da je to. (T1)*

*[I would say that this was, perhaps, the biggest problem. If I had to choose something, I would choose that.]*

She finds this to be the biggest problem because she does not want any of her students to be damaged in any way. Thus, she has decided not to translate or speak Croatian in front of the entire class, but individually to the HI students when necessary. In addition, she mentions there is another issue that occurs when the rest of the class interacts in English - due to having a hard time following the conversation, HI students' attention often drifts and it is difficult for the teacher to make them participate in the activities again.

It seems that, as far as communication in the classroom is concerned, the struggles teachers in this study face are similar to those of teachers from France and Hungary reported by Bedoin (2011) and Piniel et al. (2016). In a similar vein to the teachers from France, the biggest challenge teachers in the mainstream schools face is trying to attend to both hearing and HI students' needs and rights regarding the usage of English and Croatian. Along with other adjustments they must constantly bear in mind, switching between languages and using them both in an appropriate amount can put a great deal of pressure on teachers during lessons. The participants try to adapt as much as possible to the HI students' needs; however, they realize that ensuring ideal conditions for every student is not always feasible. Just like for the teachers from the study by Piniel et al. (2016), the greatest problem for the teacher in the specialized institution is the inadequate level of sign language proficiency, which prevents her from

providing the HI students with equal language learning opportunities. As opposed to other countries where teachers are provided with sign language courses, it seems that in Croatia this is not the case. The study by Bajko and Kontra (2008) has shown that the teacher's sign language proficiency facilitates the course of the class for both the teacher and the HI students. Therefore, one of the priorities should become providing teachers of HI students who communicate via sign language with sign language courses, otherwise the HI students' rights, legal guidelines, and expert recommendations are being violated.

### ***3.5.5. Learning outcomes and assessment***

The most important thing teachers have to do in order to help the students successfully achieve the learning outcomes and assess them properly is to develop the syllabus. Most of the participants report having to develop the syllabus for the HI students by themselves. Although the expert associates provide the teachers with guidelines on how to adapt the syllabus, they do not take part in the process, so the teachers say it is based mostly on a trial and error method. This practice raises the question whether teachers are able to design the syllabus properly without the necessary help. It also leads us to ponder what teachers need to know in advance in order to successfully plan the syllabus.

T1 partly answers those questions. She indicates that the syllabus development is the most challenging when she does not know the HI student very well, which usually happens in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade or when the student has been transferred from SUVAG Elementary School. An additional obstacle she faces is having to take into account that the HI students in their school often have multiple difficulties. It is exceptionally difficult to adapt the syllabus in the case of multiple difficulties since, as has previously been mentioned, teachers often do not obtain enough information about HI students' other medical conditions. This, along with not having direct help from the expert associates, inevitably complicates the process of syllabus design and leads to mistakes and inappropriate adjustments. What helps T1 in this process are the discussions with class teachers and colleagues from the prolonged professional treatment during the HI students' transition from lower to upper elementary grades, when they discuss the strengths and weaknesses of every student individually. The cooperation between T1 and class teachers confirms that teachers feel the need to be better informed about their HI students' needs and strengths. It also validates the recommendations of previously mentioned experts (Bakota

& Čilić Burušić, 2014; Dulčić et al., 2012; Ivasović & Andrijević Gajić, 2008), but once again it can be seen that their advice is being ignored.

The participants' answers have shown that mainstream school teachers have quite contrasting experiences regarding the syllabus development. While T4 is very satisfied with the guidelines and help she receives from the expert associates and does not encounter any difficulties when adjusting teaching methods for her HI student, T3 has been experiencing extreme difficulties related to methods adjustment, which is only aggravated by her student's inappropriately adjusted curriculum. Although she receives guidelines from the expert associates, she points out that they are not always applicable in practice:

*Ja znam da mu trebam skratit broj zadataka, produjtit vrijeme rada, znam da mu trebam istaknut ključne pojmove, znam ja to sve, ali to nije dovoljno i to ne daje rezultat. I to nije ono što ja radim da bi od njega...Mislim, radimo sasvim deseto nešto, mašemo rukama, nogama, asistentica mu prepričava moja pitanja... (T3)*

*[I know I have to give him less exercises to do, give him more time, I know I have to highlight key terms, I know all of that, but it is not enough and it doesn't show results. And it's not what I do to get...I mean, we do completely different things, we wave our arms and legs, the paraprofessional retells my questions...]*

The syllabus design in the specialized institution is somewhat different, but the challenges T5 faces are similar to those of mainstream school teachers. The students follow a curriculum of a three-year mainstream culinary vocational school, but which is extended to four years in the specialized institution. The teacher adapts the curriculum to reduce the subject matter and additionally adapts each lesson for every student individually. Since she receives little help from the expert associates in the process of syllabus design, she states it is much more time-consuming than in the mainstream school, especially because she has trouble finding appropriate teaching materials, which will be discussed in more details in the following section.

As for The Croatian National Educational Standard for the English Language, the participants are not fond of using it as a reference document when designing a syllabus for the HI students. They believe the guidelines should be more detailed and specific and that they should differentiate between individualized and adjusted curriculum, which is currently not the case. However, the teachers are aware that the difficulties and competences of the HI children are very individual and that it is not possible to generalize or successfully utilize the same recommendations with every child. Therefore, T4 and T5 point out that certain recommendations, such as reducing vocabulary by a certain percentage, are not appropriate

criteria for adjusting the syllabus. Instead, they estimate their students' capabilities by themselves and make adjustments to their benefit.

As far as the development of the four language skills and the achievement of learning outcomes is concerned, the teachers' answers have shown that they face a variety of challenges in order to help the HI students achieve acceptable results. A detailed outline of the challenges mentioned, along with verbatim quotes, can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. An outline of challenges teachers face when developing the four language skills.

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Verbatim quote</b>
<b>LISTENING</b>	assessment	“He cannot answer certain questions or comprehend a text like other students can, but I have to grade him like the rest of the class because the criteria are the same.” (T6)  “I cannot even estimate how much [of the recording] he heard.” (T3)
	adjusting teacher talk	“When I talk during a lesson, it is difficult for them to follow and understand what I said because it is too fast, too complicated, the sentences are too long...This is definitely the biggest problem regarding listening.” (T1)
<b>SPEAKING</b>	encouraging independent production	“Most of them won't even try. It is really hard to persuade them, they don't understand the task...” (T1)
	speech intelligibility	“It is difficult to understand them sometimes because they cannot pronounce words as well as other kids.” (T2)
	insecurity with own teaching methods	“Sometimes they remember new words while reading, but [I present] new vocabulary with a transcript in Croatian. (...) Which I'm actually not sure I should do, I adapt as much as I can.” (T5)
<b>READING</b>	time management	“So, a lot of time is spent on explaining the meaning of a text, on elaboration...” (T1)
	long-term memory retention	“He will learn to read it with the paraprofessional for a particular lesson. But the following lesson, he will not be able to read it anymore.” (T3)
	assessment	“His pronunciation cannot be the same as of other students, so it is difficult to decide which grade to give him with respect to his abilities.” (T6)

<b>WRITING</b>	assessment	“In the end, it is, obviously, very difficult to assess it. You try not to take into account the grammar, the spelling, but only the content. But with all those mistakes, it is questionable how much of their message they managed to get across. It is very difficult sometimes to understand what they wanted to say in their essays.” (T1)
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Regarding the development of listening skills, the biggest problem for the HI students is listening comprehension, despite the adjustment of the teaching methods (e.g. turning the volume on, playing the recording several times, providing a written text, etc.). This leads to assessment issues since the teachers have to take into account the student’s difficulty, but often, depending on the curriculum the HI student follows, apply the same criteria as for the rest of the class. Therefore, listening activities have often been replaced with reading comprehension tasks.

Clearly, poor listening skills have a negative impact on HI students’ speaking since, as T1 reports, HI students have a hard time listening to and understanding the teacher and their peers in non-structured discussions (due to quick turn-taking, long and complex utterances, etc.). Adding to the fact that they do not have as much life experience and prior knowledge as their peers, they rarely engage in conversations and state their opinions on their own. Thus, it is very difficult for the teacher to get them to participate in discussions. However, she states that when they have announced oral exams or pair work, they prepare very well in the prolonged professional treatment and achieve very good results. In contrast, T3 says that despite practicing with the paraprofessional, her HI student can only produce very short utterances and give short answers to simple questions. He cannot engage in any kind of conversation or produce a string of utterances and anything he learns is temporary and forgotten by the next lesson. T5 reports having trouble with developing speaking skills as well, which is understandable since her students are usually profoundly deaf. They can rarely produce comprehensible speech and only if the teacher provides them with a how-to-read transcript with Croatian letters (e.g. chocolate - čokolat), even though she is not sure this is a proper teaching method. Furthermore, the teachers report that their students’ utterances are often short with poor vocabulary and that they have trouble with sentence intonation, rhythm, and accents. T2 states that she sometimes has trouble understanding HI students since their pronunciation is not intelligible enough. This goes along the lines of Moritz’s (2016) research on English speech intelligibility of French HI students and shows that poor speech intelligibility of HI students can be an obstacle for the teachers. It is also important to note that in the case when a teacher does not understand the HI

student, he or she might feel embarrassed and uncomfortable, which is to be avoided with this group of learners. Therefore, it would be useful to educate teachers about the characteristics of the HI persons' speech in order to understand them better and teach the lesson more easily.

The biggest issues HI students have with reading are related to too long texts in the textbooks with plenty of new vocabulary, metaphors, and humor they have a hard time understanding. They also struggle with pronunciation and long-term memory retention. Consequently, teachers have to adjust the texts to their students' needs, which often takes a lot of time. Also, as with the listening activities, they find it hard to assess their students' reading skills applying the same criteria as for the hearing students.

As far as writing skills are concerned, assessment again proves to be a big obstacle for teachers. The HI students' written work often consists of short, simple sentences with a lot of grammar and spelling mistakes and mixing of Croatian and English syntax. Therefore, T1 states she tries not to take into account those mistakes, but grade only the content. However, even that is difficult sometimes, given that it can be very demanding to follow the HI students' stream of thought in their written work and that they themselves cannot always explain what they wanted to say.

The participants report facing similar challenges with regard to different parts of the subject matter.

As far as cultural content is concerned, teachers in the mainstream schools say that HI students do not differ much from their hearing peers and that they usually enjoy culture-related activities the most. On the other hand, T5 states that her deaf students have a hard time understanding and accepting anything that is different from the deaf culture, so it is difficult for her to describe different cultural aspects of the English-speaking countries to them.

The most difficult issue teachers have to deal with regarding vocabulary development is the HI students' short-term memory, which they have to constantly bear in mind when introducing and assessing new vocabulary. T5 adds that it is especially challenging to introduce new vocabulary items when the student is not familiar with the Croatian equivalent, which is often the case with her HI students.

HI students' short-term memory, i.e. impaired long-term memory retention, is a challenge for both the HI students and the teachers when it comes to the introduction of new grammar content. Thus, teachers have to spend much more time during lessons on explaining and revising the content; they have to simplify the rules and not include exceptions to the rules; and provide the students with a detailed visual representation of the rules and give them more

time to grasp new concepts. T5 mentions that she can introduce grammar only with the use of sign language, which due to her poor proficiency, is often difficult to do. Also, both T5 and T3 report that their students are not able to correctly produce grammatical structures without constant scaffolding and guidance. T1 states that the most challenging thing for her is to attend to each HI student individually during a lesson. It is difficult for her to try to explain the content in Croatian, answer their questions, get feedback, try to encourage them to reproduce the grammatical structure in English, and at the same time to keep in mind not to disrupt the course of the lesson or neglect the rest of the class. However, she emphasizes the importance of repetition and revision of new subject matter with HI students. When covering new subject matter, in addition to explaining it individually to HI students during classes, she goes through it again in more detail in remedial classes. Moreover, the students revise the matter in the prolonged professional treatment with the help of the experts that work there, i.e. phoneticians and speech therapists.

Interestingly, although the prolonged professional treatment program has been mentioned by T1 and T2 on several occasions during the interview, its importance has come to the fore in the discussion on covering the subject matter and the development of language skills. The program utilizes the verbotonal method of speech and hearing rehabilitation, including the SUVAG machines. Thus, the HI students are able to work with experts from the SUVAG Polyclinic on improving their speech and hearing skills on the school premises. In addition, the experts help them revise the subject matter, and help them with homework and assignments the students need to prepare for class. As opposed to the student of T3, who does not make any progress despite the help of the paraprofessional, and the student of T6, who does not even attend remedial classes, the students of T1 and T2, according to the teachers' words, directly benefit from this type of program. It helps them to more easily achieve the learning outcomes and provides them with an opportunity of constant practice and regular monitoring of their progress. Moreover, the program helps the teachers as well since they can count on the support and advice from the SUVAG experts and can attend to other students during classes with more ease, knowing that the HI students will be provided with professional assistance after classes. This can be seen in the following statement made by T2: *"I don't know what I would do without it; it would be very difficult..."* Therefore, the policy makers should consider finding ways to make the prolonged professional treatment program an integral part of every HI student's mainstream education, given the benefits it brings.

Regarding the assessment criteria development, only T5 receives help from the expert associates in the development process - they decide together what should and what should not be assessed. In addition, the associates sometimes participate in oral examinations or written tests design. On the contrary, the participants from the mainstream schools develop the criteria by themselves, which can be seen in the following statement:

*Mi ne sastavljamo kriterije za vrednovanje za djecu, ja i stručne službe. Mi imamo kriterije za vrednovanje za svu djecu, a onda ovisi jesu li oni po individualiziranom postupku ili po prilagođenom programu i onda se sam profesor snalazi s tim, i onda je normalno, drugačija skala. (T4)*

*[We don't develop the assessment criteria, the expert associates and I. We have assessment criteria for all children, and then, depending on whether they follow an individualized or adjusted curriculum, the teachers deal with the adjustments themselves, and then, of course, the grading scale is different.]*

T1 mentions that for her the most challenging aspect of assessment criteria development is to determine which parts of subject matter HI students cannot learn and for which parts they need more time; as well as to determine their limitations and find ways to move past those limitations if possible. It can be seen from her example that teachers put much thought and effort into this process, but do not receive much support. Thus, it is no wonder that all six of the participants state that they would like to have more detailed and precise guidelines for assessment criteria development in order to more easily determine what not to assess. In addition to that, T1 mentions it would be of great help to have access to ready, government-approved assessment material adjusted to the HI students' needs.

The teachers' answers on the subject matter and the development of language skills have shown that assessment is the biggest and most common obstacle they face. Students with hearing impairments in mainstream schools often attend classes according to the regular or individualized curriculum; therefore, the same assessment criteria apply to them as to their hearing peers. However, teachers often feel uncomfortable with having to use the same criteria because they see that students' difficulties directly affect their learning process. T3 particularly struggles with grading her student according to the criteria and taking into account his capabilities at the same time. She says she used to give him good grades to reward his constant effort, but she realized she would have to start giving him grades that are more realistic in order to be able to ask for an official change of the student's curriculum. The Regulation on Means, Methods and Elements of Assessing Students in Primary and Secondary School (Official



Gazette, No. 112/10) does not bring much comfort or clarification for the teachers since its guidelines are rather vague and the same for both types of curricula and refer to all types of developmental difficulties. However, it does indicate that the means, methods and elements of assessment should be adapted according to the student's difficulty, which teachers in this study were either not aware of or were told differently by the expert associates. Situations like these imply that there should be better assessment criteria regulations with regard to different types of mainstream curricula available for students with hearing impairments and other difficulties. There is also a need for a uniform interpretation of these regulations among different schools, teachers and expert associates. This is necessary so the teachers could stop putting their HI students at a disadvantage because of the inadequate or misinterpreted regulations and start acting in their students' best interest.

Short-term memory is another aspect of HI students' cognitive functioning that is closely linked to assessment issues. T1 states that teachers must always take it into account when assessing HI students and not expect them to know anything but the current subject matter. However, it seems that not all teachers are aware of this facet of hearing impairments. One of the teachers states that she is not sure whether her student forgets so easily because of his difficulty or because he has not been studying enough, so she never takes that into account while grading him. These kind of statements bring focus to the importance of receiving proper education on hearing impairments and of having enough professional support during the assessment criteria development.

The teachers' answers in this section have shown that the existing curricula for the HI students do not take into account current SLA trends with regard to HI learners nor the recommendations of the Council of Europe for the development of communicative competence. This calls for a revision and modification of current curricula in order to better take into account individual differences among HI students. It seems that some of the HI students struggle with mastering the amount of the subject matter that is supposed to be covered in a school year. This might partly be so because of their difficulties with long-term memory retention and partly due to the extensive amount of the content. For some HI students, such as the student of T3, it is especially difficult to master the content without constant scaffolding, which, as Marschark and Knoors (2012) and Saville-Troike (2006) point out, should not be an end in itself. Indeed, there is no point in forcing a HI student to learn the content he or she will not be able to utilize independently and in different situations. Instead, a potential new curriculum should focus on

fostering independence in HI students and developing particular competences that correspond with each HI student's communicative and social needs. For that reason, teachers might find it useful to have a special English language curriculum for HI learners, as is the one implemented in Serbia. Moreover, the HI students, especially those who do not communicate orally, might benefit from being able to choose among different types of content, e.g. learning about the English-speaking deaf culture and thus getting familiarized with other cultures, which T5 mentioned her students have trouble doing. Also, the curriculum should allow the HI students to choose among different modes of communication, going along the lines of the aforementioned Scandinavian educational systems. Of course, it should be taken into account that in an educational system that currently does not ensure systematic training of teachers nor does it implement HI students' basic educational rights (e.g. sign interpreters), this type of curriculum might not be developed in the near future. However, positive practices from other countries should serve as guidance for future changes and improvements. Finally, it is important to emphasize that, due to the heterogeneity of the group; a single, unique English language curriculum for all HI learners is not a very feasible idea. However, both teachers and students are in need of a different approach to curriculum development that would allow for different interpretations and easier adjustment according to the HI students' needs, but with constant and professional guidance of experts in the field of hearing impairments being available for teachers.

### ***3.5.6. Teaching materials and activities***

As far as teaching materials are concerned, the biggest challenge the participants mention is having inappropriate textbooks for working with HI students. They use regular textbooks, which are, as T5 states, aimed at an entirely different population of students. Thus, due to their poor vocabulary, HI students have trouble understanding long texts with plenty of phrasal verbs, metaphors, inversions, etc. Also, they struggle with doing the textbook exercises since the instructions are written only in English and there are not enough examples for HI students to get the grasp of certain grammatical structures. Therefore, the teachers report having to adjust the texts and speaking and listening exercises in every textbook unit, which is extremely challenging and time-consuming since they have to do it for each lesson. All of the teachers, except T4, say that they do not know who to ask for help with adapting the material, so they mostly resort to improvising and creating their own teaching material. T1 mentions she

struggles with having to adjust the materials and at the same time bear in mind not to depart too much from the syllabus or activities for the rest of the class. She states that the lack of ready teaching material is one of the biggest challenges she has faced while working with HI learners. Once again, T2 emphasizes the importance of the prolonged professional treatment program, where the experts go through the textbook texts and exercises with the HI learners in more detail; and T3 emphasizes the help she receives from the paraprofessional, who creates most of the additional teaching materials on her own.

Regarding the activities used during lessons, all the teachers frequently incorporate pair work and group work into their lesson plans and highlight the importance of including HI learners into such activities. Participating in those activities boosts the HI students’ self-confidence and improves social skills of all students since they learn to help each other. However, the teachers point out that they often have to provide much more guidance and help to the HI students during those activities and give them very simple tasks, or in the case of the student of T3, the very minimum to do. Thus, it would be useful to provide the teachers with professional support and knowledge to create activities that would provide more learning opportunities for the HI students.

The teachers mention several different obstacles they deal with regularly with regard to lesson planning. Only T3 and T4 state they plan their lessons in the usual manner, since the latter has a very successful HI student, and the former receives help from the paraprofessional. A more detailed outline of the teachers’ answers, which can be seen in Table 3, shows that they plan their lessons very carefully, always keeping in mind their students’ needs. Moreover, it shows in which areas of lesson planning and teaching they need more support with regard to HI learners.

Table 3. The challenges teachers face while planning a lesson

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Verbatim quote</b>
<b>1.</b>	adapting listening activities	“Well, one of the problems is certainly listening, listening activities. For other students there is a good ratio of things to read, listen, look at in the textbooks, but for HI students all of that turns into reading of some kind. So then you try to change something, make it different or more interesting.” (T1)

2.	evaluating the HI student's knowledge and abilities	<p>"I think it is also challenging to evaluate their knowledge level, their capabilities...What they can comprehend, what they can't, what needs to be explained differently...Sometimes they surprise you, sometimes they can participate in a lesson without a problem, they understand very well what they have read or what is being talked about. And sometimes they struggle with very simple things and you are left surprised because you didn't expect that to be a problem." (T1)</p> <p>"The first challenge I face is that I have to know the entire class, the students as a group. I have to know precisely what difficulties they have and then I have to attend to every student differently." (T5)</p>
3.	"predicting the unpredictable" – being aware that not all activities for the HI students will go according to plan and that they might have to improvise on the spot	<p>"Sometimes I give them a task and see how it goes. Then, if necessary, I help them, additionally explain something..." (T2)</p> <p>"Regardless of my plans, I still have to make changes and adaptations according to his needs, because I never know what will work and what won't." (T6)</p>
4.	finding ways to encourage the HI student to independently communicate with the rest of the class	<p>"Well, let's say trying to make him communicate with other students without my guidance, to make him independently and creatively use the language like the rest of the students." (T6)</p>
5.	finding ways of explaining grammatical structures that are not characteristic of the Croatian language	<p>"As far as grammar is concerned, explaining it is a real challenge. For example, the articles or the Present Perfect, which does not exist in Croatian, so you cannot make connections with their L1 to make it easier for them... That is the biggest problem." (T1)</p>
6.	creating appropriate teaching materials	<p>"Finding the materials [is a challenge]. I can use very little from the textbook, maybe certain topics or pictures for the introductory part. It is too complicated for them. If we manage to do a certain task from the textbook, much more effort is needed, by me and by the students. For example, if we have five sentences, I have to explain almost every sentence, and lead them to the final answer. Much more effort is needed because the textbooks are aimed at an entirely different population of students." (T5)</p>

### ***3.5.7. HI students' attitudes towards and motivation for learning English***

The participants' answers have shown that HI students generally enjoy learning English; however, there are some differences among the students.

T1, T5 and T6 state that although their HI students' attitudes do not differ much from the rest of the class, due to not having enough input in English, they do need more motivation and encouragement, especially for independent production.

T3 says that, although the initial rejection of learning English has disappeared, her HI student is not especially motivated for learning it. Even though he reacts positively to praise, he becomes frustrated when he realizes he is not making any progress despite his constant effort.

On the contrary, T2 and T4, who teach lower primary students, report that their students are highly motivated for learning English and are very engaged in every lesson. It is interesting to note that T2 and T4, just like their students, display positive attitudes throughout the interviews and report facing very few to no challenges at all. It is difficult to make inferences based on the experience of only two teachers, but it would be interesting to further investigate whether their positive attitudes are a result of teaching lower primary students. It might be the case that the sooner the child is able to be integrated into a mainstream school, the lesser is the degree of their difficulty, and consequently, the teachers face fewer challenges. This implies that upper primary teachers might need more or a different kind of support when teaching children with hearing impairments than lower primary teachers.

Furthermore, the teachers' answers have shown that parental involvement and attitudes towards learning English have a great influence on the HI students' attitudes. The HI students of T4, T5, and T6 have very supportive parents, which facilitates their learning process and helps them stay motivated and positive. T1, on the other hand, reports that the parents of one of her HI students were deaf, could not speak English, did not consider English to be an important subject, and encouraged that kind of attitude in their child, which made it very difficult for the teacher to keep the student engaged and motivated during classes. Since parental involvement in their child's education obviously plays an important role, the parents should be provided with different kinds of professional support, too.

As far as promoting learner autonomy with HI learners is concerned, it seems that the teachers are not very successful at implementing it into their lessons. T1 states that she experienced both positive and negative outcomes – in one case the student was very proud of

his progress after self-evaluation, whereas the other student started comparing himself to the rest of the class and feeling bad about his results so the teacher stopped insisting on it. T3 mentions it is impossible to develop any kind of learner autonomy with her student since he is completely reliant on the paraprofessional. T5 says she has never even tried to utilize this practice with her students. The rest of the participants have provided answers that are inconclusive and not to the point.

### ***3.5.8. Closing section***

Having reflected on their experience of teaching HI learners, the participants have concluded that there are many different factors that influence the HI learners' progress and success. The most important factors, in their opinion, are the HI learners' effort, motivation and work, followed by parental support, (in)appropriate placement options, peer acceptance, and the type of difficulty. Although with time and experience it has become easier for them to successfully deal with all these factors, the teachers report that at first they felt scared, helpless and under-prepared. In order to improve the situation for both the HI learners and their teachers, the participants recommend incorporating SEN courses in teacher training studies; organizing obligatory SEN workshops and conferences that focus on methodology and practical examples, rather than theoretical knowledge; providing additional professional support for HI learners and their teachers; developing appropriate placement options and curricula for HI students; and creating ready-to-use, adjusted teaching materials. It can be seen that the participants are very well aware of the downside of the Croatian educational system with regard to HI students and their opinions and recommendations perfectly sum up the findings of this study.

## 4. Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the state of the art in Croatian educational system regarding teaching English to HI learners.

Even though several laws regulate the education of children with difficulties in Croatia, including HI children, certain worrying trends have been noticed while conducting the study. The results have shown that the teachers of English are extremely underprepared for teaching HI students, which leads to inappropriate teaching strategies being used during lessons. Thus, this implies that providing pre-service and in-service education to teachers of HI learners is of paramount importance. Teaching studies should be revised and professional development in SEN field should be provided in order for effective teaching strategies to be utilized with HI learners.

Furthermore, the findings have shown that the lack of appropriate teaching materials and the existence of inappropriate placement options and curricula available for HI learners further exacerbate the situation. Obviously, whether the HI learners are educated in mainstream or specialized institutions, numerous factors affect their education. In order to successfully include them in the educational system, continuous and systematic support system is necessary for teachers, students, and parents. Moreover, the ambiguous interpretation of certain educational laws implies that there should be an external agency which would control and monitor the implementation of legal guidelines and HI students' educational rights. However, it must be noted that, despite the challenges and issues that have emerged during the study, certain positive practices have been observed (such as the prolonged professional treatment program) and that the teachers showed great sensitivity to and a desire to learn more about their students' needs.

Even though this was a small-scale study, it provided qualitative insight into this issue and identified several avenues for future research. It would be interesting to investigate the situation in other urban and rural areas in Croatia, with an equal number of mainstream and specialized institution represented on both elementary and secondary level, to get a more realistic representation of the situation in the country. Finally, it is important to note that the findings fell along the lines of similar studies in other countries, which calls for a greater international cooperation in the field of teaching English to HI students.

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## Appendix: Interview guide

### OBRAZOVANJE I RADNO ISKUSTVO

1. Možete li mi dati informacije o Vašoj stručnoj spremi i nastavničkim kvalifikacijama?
2. Koliko godina iskustva imate u poučavanju engleskog jezika?
3. Koliko dugo predajete u ovoj školi?
4. S učenicima koje dobi ste najviše radili?
5. Koliko i kakvog iskustva imate u radu s djecom sa slušnim oštećenjima? *(Koji je otprilike broj učenika sa sl. oštećenjima kojima ste do sada predavali?)*
6. Poznajete li znakovni jezik?
7. Jeste li i kakvu ste edukaciju prošli u vezi poučavanja djece sa slušnim oštećenjima? *(Je li to bilo tijekom ili nakon studiranja? U kojem se otprilike postotku ta edukacija odnosila na teorijska saznanja o sl. oštećenjima, a u kojem na samu metodiku poučavanja engleskog djeci sa sl. oštećenjima?)*
8. Jeste li upoznati s verbotonalnim pristupom i AVGS metodom poučavanja jezika? *(Kako? Gdje?)*
9. Koliko Vam je edukacija kroz koju ste prošli pomogla u daljnjem radu? *(Jeste li mogli i uspjeti primijeniti u nastavi ono što ste čuli na edukaciji i u kojoj mjeri?)*
10. Omogućuje li Vam i potiče li Vas škola u kojoj trenutno radite na dodatnu edukaciju iz područja rada s djecom sa slušnim oštećenjima?
11. Osjećate li trenutno potrebu za daljnjom edukacijom u ovom području i iz kojih razloga?
12. Je li i zbog čega je, prema Vašem mišljenju, potrebna edukacija nastavnika engleskog jezika za rad s učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima?

### UVJETI RADA I ODNOSI U ŠKOLI

13. Kojem broju učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima trenutno predajete?

14. Koliko učenika sa teškoćama u razvoju imate u svakom razredu, a koliki je ukupan broj učenika u svakom pojedinom razredu? Na koji način ukupan broj učenika i broj učenika s teškoćama utječu na izvođenje nastave?
15. Koriste li učenici kojima predajete slušna pomagala (sl. aparatiće i/ili umjetne pužnice)? Susrećete li se s nekim izazovima na nastavi vezanim uz slušna pomagala?
16. Koristite li Vi i Vaši učenici pomagala poput FM sustava? Koliko Vam njihovo korištenje olakšava, a koliko otežava provođenje nastave?
17. Imaju li učenici sa slušnim oštećenjima kojima predajete asistenta u nastavi? Možete li ukratko opisati suradnju s asistentom? Jeste li zadovoljni tom suradnjom? (*Što sve radi, oko čega vodi brigu – i na satu i van sata?*)
18. Je li i zbog čega je, prema Vašem mišljenju, asistent u nastavi koristan i potreban učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima na satu engleskog jezika?
19. Suradujete li s ostalim kolegama i stručnim suradnicima u Vašoj školi koji rade s učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima i na koji način? Jeste li zadovoljni s tom suradnjom?
20. Na koji način suradujete s roditeljima djece sa slušnim oštećenjima? Jeste li zadovoljni tom suradnjom?

#### STAVOVI O INKLUZIJ I INTEGRACIJI

21. Je li, prema Vašem mišljenju, integracija djece sa slušnim oštećenjima u redovne obrazovne programe korisna i zbog čega?
22. Mislite li da je integracija učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima pogodna za učenje i poučavanje engleskog jezika ili bi ti učenici imali bolji uspjeh na nastavi engleskog jezika u odvojenim grupama? Zbog čega?
23. Kako na ostale učenike utječe integracija djece sa slušnim oštećenjima na nastavi engleskog jezika? (*Zbog čega im koristi, a zbog čega im otežava?*)
24. Pozitivne strane ranog učenja stranog jezika vrlo su dobro poznate, zbog čega se 2003. godine i u hrvatske osnovne škole uvelo učenje engleskog jezika od 1. razreda osnovne škole. No, često djeca sa slušnim oštećenjima do polaska u školu imaju nedovoljno razvijene jezične vještine na materinjem jeziku. S obzirom na to, kako, prema Vašem mišljenju i dosadašnjem iskustvu, rani početak učenja utječe na usvajanje engleskog jezika, a kako na daljnji razvoj jezičnih vještina na materinjem jeziku?

## KOMUNIKACIJA

25. Jedan od prvih problema s kojim se profesori učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima suočavaju je pitanje same komunikacije. Na koje prepreke nailazite prilikom komuniciranja s učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima i na koji ih način prelazite?
26. S ciljem bržeg i uspješnijeg razvijanja komunikacijskih kompetencija, *HNOS za engleski jezik* potiče na korištenje engleskog jezika na satu što je više moguće te na minimalno korištenje materinjeg jezika. U kojoj je to mjeri moguće s učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima?
27. Koristite li Vi i Vaši učenici znakovni jezik na satu i kako to utječe na izvođenje nastave?

## ISHODI I VREDNOVANJE

28. Na koji način sastavljate nastavni plan za učenike sa sl. oštećenjima koji ne rade po redovnom programu i na koje prepreke nailazite? (*Koje upute dobivate? Pomažu li Vam stručni suradnici ili ga sastavljate sami?*)
29. Koliko ste zadovoljni uputama o znanjima i vještinama navedenim u HNOS-u za engleski jezik koje učenici sa slušnim oštećenjima trebaju usvojiti u pojedinom razredu? Smatrate li da ih treba poboljšati i na koji način?
30. Prema *Pravilniku o načinima, postupcima i elementima vrednovanja*, kriterije vrednovanja za učenike s teškoćama u razredu sastavlja predmetni profesor, po potrebi u suradnji s defektologom i drugim stručnim suradnicima. Na koji način to funkcionira i na koje izazove nailazite prilikom sastavljanja kriterija? (*Kakva je suradnja, kakve su upute, koliko toga morate sami?*)
31. Smatrate li da bi trebale postojati detaljnije i uređenije smjernice za vrednovanje učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima i zbog čega?
32. Možete li za svaku od četiri jezične vještine – slušanje, govor, čitanje i pisanje – navesti što Vam predstavlja najveći izazov prilikom razvijanja tih vještina kod učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima?
33. S kojim se izazovima susrećete prilikom obrađivanja leksičkog gradiva, s kojim prilikom obrađivanja gramatičkih struktura, a s kojim prilikom obrađivanja kulturnih sadržaja i kako ih rješavate?

34. Postoji li i koji je dio gradiva koji učenici sa slušnim oštećenjima gotovo nikad ne uspiju usvojiti i na koji ih način vrednujete u tom slučaju?

### MATERIJALI I AKTIVNOSTI

35. S kojim se izazovima susrećete prilikom pronalaska i prilagođavanja materijala za učenike sa slušnim oštećenjima?
36. Možete li otprilike procijeniti koliki je postotak gotovih materijala koji su Vam dostupni za rad s učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima, a koliki je postotak materijala koje sami izrađujete?
37. Smatrate li da su udžbenici engleskog jezika prilagođeni radu s učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima? Na koje prepreke nailazite prilikom korištenja udžbenika?
38. Rad u paru, grupni rad i debate vrlo su česte aktivnosti zadane u udžbenicima. Na kakve probleme nailazite prilikom uključivanja učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima u takve aktivnosti?
39. Koja su tri najteža izazova s kojima se susrećete pri planiranju nastavnog sata?

### STAVOVI I MOTIVACIJA UČENIKA

40. Prema Vašem iskustvu, kakvi su stavovi i motivacija za učenje engleskog jezika učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima? *(Razlikuju li se u odnosu na učenike urednog razvoja i po čemu? Utječu li stavovi roditelja na stavove djece i na koji način?)*
41. Na koji način njihovi stavovi i motivacija utječu na izvođenje nastave i usvajanje gradiva?
42. S kojim se izazovima susrećete prilikom poticanja autonomije u procesu učenja engleskog jezika kod učenika sa slušnim oštećenjima?

### ZAVRŠNA PITANJA

43. Možete li se prisjetiti kako ste se osjećali i što Vam je bio najveći izazov kada ste se prvi put susreli s učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima na nastavi engleskog jezika u odnosu na danas?
44. Možemo zaključiti da je za uspješno uključivanje djece sa slušnim oštećenjima u redovnu nastavu zaslužan niz faktora. Možete li se prisjetiti jednog učenika koji je svojim i Vašim trudom uspio postići iznimne rezultate i koji su sve faktori, prema

Vašem mišljenju, na to utjecali?

Također, možete li se prisjetiti učenika koji unatoč svim naporima nije uspio postići zadovoljavajuće rezultate i zbog čega je do toga došlo?

45. Koje su, prema Vašem mišljenju, tri najvažnije promjene koje se trebaju uvesti u sustav obrazovanja u području poučavanja stranih jezika kako bi se učiteljima djece sa slušnim oštećenjima omogućilo što kvalitetnije provođenje nastave stranih jezika?
46. Smatrate li da su pitanja i teme pokrivena u ovom intervjuu bile važne i prikladne za problematiku poučavanja engleskog jezika djeci sa slušnim oštećenjima?
47. Imate li što za dodati?



## **Summary**

### **Challenges of teaching English to hearing-impaired students**

The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges teachers face while teaching English to hearing-impaired (HI) students. Due to the fact that research on this topic is scarce in Croatia, a qualitative approach was used to get a deeper insight into the current situation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six female teachers that worked in four different mainstream elementary schools and one specialized secondary level institution in Zagreb. The participants' answers have shown that teachers face various challenges, some of the most important ones being the following: the lack of proper pre-service and in-service training, inadequate support of expert associates working in schools, inappropriate placement options of HI students, the lack of appropriate and government approved teaching materials, and ambiguous interpretation of certain educational laws. Although conducted on a small sample, the study provided better understanding of the teachers' needs, which might lead to the improvement of teaching practices in the context of teaching English to HI students.

Keywords: challenges, teaching English, HI students

## **Sažetak**

### **Izazovi poučavanja engleskog jezika učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjem**

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je identificirati izazove s kojima se susreću nastavnici prilikom poučavanja engleskog jezika djeci sa slušnim oštećenjima. Budući da u Hrvatskoj ne postoji mnogo istraživanja na ovu temu, odabran je kvalitativni pristup kako bi se dobio dublji uvid u trenutnu situaciju. Polustrukturirani intervjui su provedeni sa šest nastavnica iz četiri različite osnovne škole te jedne specijalizirane srednjoškolske institucije u Zagrebu. Istraživanje je pokazalo da se nastavnice susreću s brojnim izazovima, od kojih su najvažniji sljedeći: nedostatak kvalitetne edukacije tijekom studija i nakon zaposlenja, nedovoljna podrška stručnih suradnika koji rade u školama, neadekvatni programi prilagodbe dodijeljeni učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima, nedostatak prikladnih nastavnih materijala odobrenih od strane Ministarstva te nedosljedna tumačenja zakona i pravilnika vezanih uz obrazovanje. Iako je istraživanje provedeno na malom uzorku, rezultati su omogućili bolje razumijevanje potreba nastavnika, što bi moglo doprinijeti poboljšanju nastavnih metoda u kontekstu poučavanja engleskog jezika učenicima sa slušnim oštećenjima.

Ključne riječi: izazovi, poučavanje engleskog jezika, učenici sa slušnim oštećenjem

## **Životopis**

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