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Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Students With Disabilities in the Republic of Croatia

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Since teaching English as a foreign language to students with disabilities has so far received little attention in national scientific discourse, which has mostly dealt just with specific subcategories of disabilities, the paper presents research conducted among Croatian primary and secondary teachers of English as a foreign language regarding their inclusive practice. Three research questions were formulated: What kind of education do teachers of English as a foreign language have about inclusion and students with disabilities? What are the experiences of these teachers in teaching students with disabilities? What kind of support do these teachers receive in the schools where they work? A descriptive research design was used, i.e., a qualitative study that included an in-depth interpretation of open-ended questions in a self-constructed and piloted questionnaire. The results show that 69.4% of the 98 participants did not have any formal education about inclusion or students with disabilities during their university studies, although 67.4% had attended a professional development programme on this topic. Most of the participants had experience in teaching students with specific learning difficulties (90.8%), and just 12.2% perceived themselves unready to work with students with disabilities. When they needed advice, the participants consulted school support team members, principals, class masters and experts or colleagues outside their school. However, only 15.3% of the teachers perceived the support they received as sufficient. The paper represents a solid starting point for further national research, e.g., on a specific category of students with disabilities or on English as a foreign language teachers working in schools with incomplete school support teams without education-rehabilitation experts.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, English as a foreign language teacher, school support team, students with disabilities

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Poučevanje angleščine kot tujega jezika za učence s posebnimi potrebami v Republiki Hrvaški

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Ker je bilo poučevanje angleščine kot tujega jezika za učence z učnimi težavami do zdaj deležno le malo pozornosti v nacionalnem znanstvenem diskurzu, ki je večinoma obravnaval le posamezne podkategorije posebnih potreb, je v prispevku predstavljena raziskava, opravljena med hrvaškimi učitelji angleščine kot tujega jezika v osnovnih in srednjih šolah, o njihovi inkluzivni praksi. Oblikovana so bila naslednja raziskovalna vprašanja: Kakšno izobraževanje imajo učitelji angleščine kot tujega jezika o inkluziji in učencih s posebnimi potrebami? Kakšne so izkušnje teh učiteljev pri poučevanju učencev s posebnimi potrebami? Kakšno podporo prejemajo ti učitelji na šolah, na katerih delajo? Uporabljen je bil deskriptivni raziskovalni načrt, tj. kvalitativna študija, ki je vključevala poglobljeno razlago vprašanj odprtega tipa v samostojno sestavljenem in preizkušenem vprašalniku. Rezultati kažejo, da 69,4 % od 98 udeležencev med visokošolskim študijem ni imelo nobenega formalnega izobraževanja o inkluziji ali učencih s posebnimi potrebami, čeprav se jih je 67,4 % udeležilo programa strokovnega razvoja na to temo. Večina udeležencev je imela izkušnje s poučevanjem učencev s specifičnimi učnimi težavami (90,8 %) in le 12,2 % jih je menilo, da niso pripravljeni na delo z učenci s posebnimi potrebami. Kadar so potrebovali nasvet, so se udeleženci posvetovali s člani šolske podporne skupine, z ravnatelji, razredniki in s strokovnjaki ali kolegi zunaj šole. Le 15,3 % učiteljev je menilo, da je podpora, ki so jo prejeli, zadostna. Prispevek predstavlja dobro izhodišče za nadaljnje nacionalne raziskave, npr. o posameznih kategorijah učencev s posebnimi potrebami ali učiteljih angleščine kot tujega jezika, ki delajo na šolah z nepopolnimi šolskimi podpornimi skupinami brez strokovnjakov s področja izobraževanja – rehabilitacije.

Ključne besede: angleščina kot tuji jezik, učitelj angleščine kot tujega jezika, šolska podporna skupina, učenci s posebnimi potrebami

Introduction

Ever since UNESCO's World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Salamanca Statement (1994), we have witnessed a wave of theoretical and empirical research on the concept of inclusive education in both Croatian and international scientific discourse (e.g., Hernández-Torrano et al., 2022; Messiou, 2017; Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). Many authors, however, point out that today, almost thirty years later, we still fail to sufficiently ensure the ideal conditions that this fundamental paradigm of modern education implies (Bouillet & Bukvić, 2015; Florian, 2014; Kudek Mirošević & Bukvić, 2017; Nilholm, 2021). Portelli and Koneeny (2018) go further and claim that we need to regain the gradually eroded courage to address impediments and concerns when advocating for inclusivity in classrooms. In such contexts, it is extremely important that both policymakers and experts employed in the education system know how to recognise the weaknesses of education policies regarding inclusion. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to students with disabilities (SWD) in Croatia is recognised as one of the weaker points of the education system when it comes to inclusion (e.g., Fišer & Dumančić, 2014; Martan, 2018; Benko & Martinović, 2021; Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Fišer, 2021a).

In this paper, SWD are defined in accordance with the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (Official Gazette, 2008a) and the Regulation on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities (Official Gazette, 2015). The former divides SWD into three categories – students with developmental disabilities; students with difficulties in learning and behavioural or emotional problems; and students with disadvantages arising from educational, socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic factors – while the latter divides students with developmental disabilities into seven groups: vision impairments; hearing impairments; language/speech/voice communication impairments and specific learning difficulties (SLD); physical disabilities and health impairments; intellectual disabilities; behaviour and mental health disorders (ADHD included, A/N); and various impairments in psychophysical development.

In the Republic of Croatia, as in almost all European countries, English is learnt by most students during primary and secondary education (Eurydice, 2023). Although SWD are the focus of the current debate on the inclusiveness of the Croatian education system, the category of teaching EFL for SWD is seldom mentioned. The data show that SWD (students with a decision on participating in an appropriate education programme) currently make up 7.53% of the total student population (Ministry of Science and Education, 2022), yet

teaching EFL for SWD has received little attention. Moreover, English language teacher education programmes continue to devote little attention to developing teachers' competence regarding teaching SWD. For example, the number of available courses intended to enable future EFL teachers to gain the competences needed to teach SWD differs between study programmes, and such courses are generally minimally represented (Fišer & Dumančić, 2014; Fišer, 2019). Furthermore, most of these courses are elective and students can typically attend only one such course, usually during the second or third year of their undergraduate programme (Fišer, 2018; Martan, 2018).

Finally, it should be emphasised that primary schools in Croatia often have an incomplete school support team (SST), who should be the first to provide support and a basic form of professional development to (EFL) teachers. The National Pedagogical Standard of the Primary School Education System (Official Gazette, 2008b) states that SSTs should comprise a pedagogue, a psychologist, an education-rehabilitation expert (an educational rehabilitator, a speech therapist and a social pedagogue, A/N), a librarian and a health worker. According to national data from the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year, primary schools currently employ an average of 2.69 SST members (Državni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske, 2023), normally a librarian, a pedagogue, and either a psychologist or an education-rehabilitation expert (Švegar et al., 2020). In this regard, it should be noted that librarians are the least qualified staff members to provide support to teachers in their direct work with SWD. In order to adequately support both teachers and SWD who learn EFL, all stakeholders involved in (language) learning, from teachers to SSTs, teacher trainers, researchers and policymakers, need to understand the extent to which the Croatian national education language policy adequately addresses – or fails to adequately address – the topic of teaching SWD.

Previous Research on the Role of the EFL Teacher in Inclusive Education

The key role of teacher preparation and professional development in ensuring inclusive education has been exhaustively researched, focusing mainly on general teacher training and teachers' beliefs and attitudes (e.g., Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Hay et al., 2001; Jordan et al., 2009; McHatton & McCray, 2007; Reinke & Moseley, 2002; Saloviita, 2020; Spratt & Florian, 2013; Zagona et al., 2017). Similar national research shows that Croatian teachers generally support inclusive education (Nikčević-Milković et al., 2019; Skočić Mihić et al., 2016; Žic Ralić et al., 2020), but perceive themselves as moderately or insufficiently competent for teaching SWD (Bouillet & Bukvić,

2015; Bouillet et al., 2017; Domović et al., 2017). Authors continually point out two fundamental reasons for this: the fact that higher education institutions for initial teacher education do not offer enough inclusive courses (Batarelo Kokić et al., 2010; Skočić Mihić, 2017) and that the teachers need more support (from SSTs, teaching assistants and specialised institutions) and further professional training (Nikčević-Milković et al., 2019; Kudek Mirošević & Jurčević Lozančić, 2014; Skočić Mihić, 2017).

Although, as Nijakowska (2019) points out, most foreign research focuses on language teachers or foreign languages in general, the present study is particularly concerned with findings about how teachers' self-confidence in the inclusive classroom is dependent on their knowledge of inclusive practices and underlying theoretical principles (Kahn-Horwitz, 2015; McCutchen et al., 2009). Studies that focus solely on EFL teachers deal mostly with specific subcategories of disabilities, particularly dyslexia and other SLD (Nijakowska et al., 2018; Nijakowska, 2019; Žero & Pižorn, 2022), but also deaf and hard-of-hearing students (Domagała-Zyśk & Podlewska, 2019), students who stutter (García-Pastor & Miller, 2019) or students with ADHD (Liontou, 2019). The same applies to the national context, where the few available studies mostly focus on dyslexia and subtopics such as the need for additional education (Fišer, 2018; Karamatić-Brčić & Viljac, 2018), the time-consuming creation of individual education plans (IEPs) and adaption of teaching materials (Benko & Martinović, 2021; Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Fišer, 2017; Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Fišer, 2021a; Kałdonek-Crnjaković & Fišer, 2021b), evaluation procedures, supplementary classes and the decrease in student motivation (Fišer, 2018; Fišer, 2020; Martan et al., 2017).

Since previous research highlights the three most common problems (insufficient education, teaching experience and support), the purpose of the present study is to expand the national research to the detected research gap, i.e., to shift the focus from teaching students with dyslexia to the entire population of SWD and to expand it to both primary and secondary EFL teachers. In order to analyse the state of inclusive practice from the perspective of EFL teachers in Croatia, three research questions were formulated:

1. What kind of education about inclusion and SWD do EFL teachers have?
2. What are their experiences of teaching SWD?
3. What kind of support do they receive in the schools where they work?

A descriptive research design was used, i.e., a qualitative study that included an in-depth interpretation of open-ended questions in a self-constructed and piloted questionnaire.

Method

Participants

After eliminating participants who had not completed their higher education in Croatia, 98 Croatian EFL teachers were included in the final sample. The youngest participant was 24 years old and the oldest was 62 years old. The mean age of the participants was 41.5 years. Therefore, we can say that the sample is dominated by participants in their most potent years of service, which should also bring a quality insight into everyday inclusive practice. The sample included 66 primary school teachers and 32 secondary school teachers. The teacher with the least experience had worked as an EFL teacher for three months, while the most experienced participant had worked as an EFL teacher for 39 years. The sample consisted of 95 female and 3 male EFL teachers. Of the participants, 75 had obtained their degree from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and 19 from the Faculty of Teacher Education, while 4 did not specify. Although not directly related to the participants, for the purposes of further analysis of the results, we also present data about the size and composition of the SST at the schools in which the participating EFL teachers work (Table 1), which is referenced in more detail within the discussion on the third research question.

Table 1

Profiles of members of school support teams

School support team	Percentage of employed SST members in participant's school (%)
Pedagogue	94.9
Librarian	80.6
Psychologist	53.1
Social pedagogue	17.3
Educational rehabilitator	15.3
Speech therapist	13.3

Instrument

Although qualitative questionnaires remain "a relatively novel and often invisible or side-lined method" (Braun et al., 2020, p. 641), we tried to craft a questionnaire consisting of as many open-ended questions as possible. These questions were presented in a fixed order (aligned with the close-ended questions) and the participants responded by typing responses in their own words rather than selecting from predetermined response options. In this way, we

tried to obtain subjective experiences, narratives, practices, positionings and discourses that were as rich as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, the questionnaire was intended to capture what participants emphasise as important, since accessing language and terminology is frequently claimed as the main advantage of qualitative research (Braun et al., 2020). The data collection questionnaire was constructed and piloted (with minor changes after the feedback). It contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions to complement each other, whereby the focus was on the in-depth interpretation of the open-ended questions. In other words, we prioritised qualitative data that would offer nuanced, in-depth and hopefully new understandings of the research topic. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions related to general information about age, gender, type of faculty, place of work, work experience and size/composition of the SST. These were followed by complementary questions of a closed-ended and open-ended type that examined the attendance of inclusive courses during higher education, concrete experience of teaching SWD, professional development in the field of inclusive education, counselling and support that teachers receive at school, and assessment of the inclusiveness of the participants' own teaching. The second part of the questionnaire contained only open-ended questions about the specific design of an inclusive environment in the participants' EFL teaching (how they adapt the content, materials, space, teaching methods, working time, knowledge testing, etc., using the example of the student disabilities they have encountered).

Research Design

The questionnaire was posted in April 2022 on various Croatian EFL teachers' Facebook groups and was available online (Google Forms) for two weeks.

The analytical process of the in-depth interpretation of the open-ended questions included familiarisation with the data and multiple readings of answers prior to commencing the analysis, followed by coding of the data set according to the analytical framework (the three formulated research questions: education, experience and support). This procedure was first carried out individually, after which both authors reviewed and discussed the inter-code reliability together and in several iterations, until they judged that they had adequately captured the flavour of the content of the answers (Brod et al., 2009).

Results

Participants' Education on Inclusion and SWD

As shown in Table 2, more than two thirds of the participants did not have any formal education about inclusion or SWD during their university studies. Nonetheless, 22.4% of them did attend a course during their higher education (e.g., language disorders, inclusive pedagogy, social pedagogy, blindness and second language acquisition, individual differences in language acquisition, psychology, didactics, etc.). However, most of these courses were, according to the respondents, of a general nature. Furthermore, 67.4% of the teachers had attended a professional development programme (at which the topics ranged from preconditions for successful inclusive education to specific categories of SWD such as ADHD, Down syndrome, learning difficulties, autism, dyslexia, phonological difficulties, etc.) in the form of workshops, lectures, conferences and webinars, but also as part of e-Schools projects.

Table 2

EFL teachers' education about inclusion and teaching SWD

Education about inclusion/SWD	Percentage of participants (%)
Attended a course	22.4
Did not attend a course	69.4
Did not remember if they attended a similar course	8.2
Attended a professional development programme	67.4
Did not attend a professional development programme	26.5
Did not remember if they attended a professional development programme on these topics	6.1
Attended a course and a professional development programme	14.3
Did not attend a course and a professional development programme	17.4

Since Article 115 of the Primary and Secondary School Education Act (Official Gazette, 2008a) stipulates teachers' right and obligation to continually attend professional development programmes, it is encouraging that more than two thirds of the participants had attended such a programme. However, there is still a cohort of 32 teachers (26 who had not attended such programmes and 6 who did not remember if they had attended), of which 17 had not attended a course or any kind of such professional development programmes. This means that 17.4% of the EFL teachers were not formally educated at all about inclusive

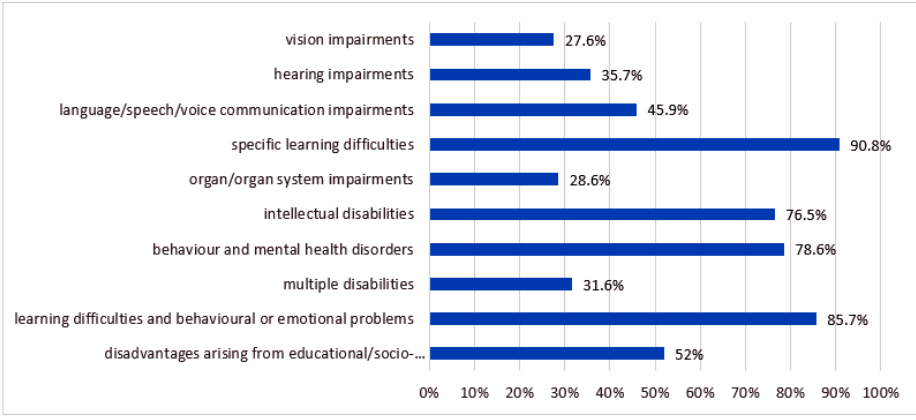
education, and that they are potentially left to handle the numerous everyday challenges of teaching SWD themselves.

Participants' Experiences in Teaching SWD

Figure 1 shows that the EFL teachers surveyed had experience in teaching students with different types of disabilities. They had the most experience in teaching students with specific learning difficulties (90.8%), students with difficulties in learning and behavioural or emotional problems (85.7%), and students with behaviour and mental health disorders (78.6%). Six of the teachers stated that they had experience in working with all of the enumerated disabilities, one teacher had only worked with students with SLD, while all of the others had experience in working with students with at least two different disabilities.

Figure 1

Participants experiences in teaching SWD (types of disabilities)



When asked about what kind of difficulty they feel most prepared to teach, the participants were most confident with SLD (44.9%) and intellectual disabilities (14.3%). On the other hand, when asked about which category of students represented the greatest difficulty in providing inclusive EFL teaching, they stated autism (22.4%), intellectual disabilities (19.3%) and behaviour disorders (12.2%). Interestingly, just 12.2% of the teachers perceived themselves as unready to work with SWD. When asked whether they perceive their teaching as inclusive, almost half of the participants (40.8%) were not sure whether their teaching was inclusive. Such results are not surprising given that previous research has shown that teachers do not have adequate knowledge of either the characteristics of SWD or the relevant teaching methods.

In the next three questions, the teachers were asked what adjustments they make for each of the three categories of SWD. The answers were very detailed. For students with developmental disabilities (e.g., vision impairments, SLD, intellectual disabilities, ADHD), the respondents stated additional time, adjusting/reducing the content, visual representation, using the mother tongue, seating arrangement, assessing knowledge based on the student's preference (oral/written), etc. For the second category (students with difficulties in learning, students with behavioural or emotional problems) and the third category of SWD (students with disadvantages arising from educational, socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic factors) the teachers mentioned adjustments that include having conversations with the student, creating a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom, expressing approval, having other students help, seating arrangement, individual approach, additional time, encouraging the student, etc.

The most in-depth and authentic answers were given to the question regarding the biggest problems when including SWD in EFL classes. At the time the study was conducted, this question had not been researched in Croatia and therefore represents the most valuable part of the findings. A few examples of the problems the participating teachers emphasised most frequently are given below:

> "Very often the student does nothing in class, or even disrupts the class, which is explained (by parents and assistants) by external factors (fatigue, moodiness, etc.) and which makes me powerless. A student with Down who has refused to communicate with me for two years and hides as soon as I approach. Lack of direct and clear communication with parents and SST. We are left to fend for ourselves, to evaluate and decide for ourselves, and there will never be a final answer about what is good and how it should be done." (P10)

> "Many SWD in the class (in one class as many as four with content adaptations, two of them with assistants, and two more with individualisation), which is why I don't manage to devote enough time to anyone in class – neither to the students with difficulties, nor to the rest of the class. The adapted programme includes students who absolutely cannot master the programme even with adaptation (I have a student in the fifth grade who is linguistically at the level of the second grade!) Also, I do not feel qualified to work with children with multiple disabilities and LMR, and more severe behavioural difficulties. I think that the educational rehabilitation programme at university takes five years for a

> reason, and it educates experts who have the knowledge and abilities to work with students with difficulties, unlike me, a self-educated teacher who improvises." (P76)

> "Apart from the students, I don't have feedback on whether it's good. The fact that the student must have all positive grades, and sometimes it happens that the student simply refuses to work, the pressure of the SST and the belittling of work and effort, the large material expenses borne by the teacher himself." (P91)

There were, however, many more respondents who focused on challenges such as the reluctance of SWD to get involved due to a lack of self-confidence and poor prior knowledge (P58); lack of adequate materials for work and the very time-consuming process of making and adapting everything by themselves (P53); students' lack of motivation since they are used to low expectations (P56); cooperation with teaching assistants (P92); the role of remedial classes (P95); other students' complaints because some tasks were adapted for SWD (P3); awareness of the knowledge gap of students with intellectual disabilities who become resigned over time (P14); disruption of classes by SWD to the extent that class performance is impossible (P49); appropriate assessment (P63); not enough training (P68), etc.

Participants' Experiences of the Support They Receive in Their Schools

In order to differentiate between the support that schools as educational institutions show towards inclusive education and the support that teachers receive from SSTs, the surveyed teachers were first asked whether and how their school supports inclusive education. For most of the EFL teachers, the concept of inclusive schools was equated with SWD enrolment. Some respondents mentioned individualisation and adapted IEPs and stated that the SST reacts to the teacher's suggestions and sends the children for treatment, that cooperation between parents and teachers is nurtured, and that seminars and workshops about SWD are organised, but many of the teachers also used syntagms such as administrational orders, formality, criteria absence or in theory when describing the situation in more detail or within their own limits.

The next question analysed whom the teachers consulted about SWD. It could be said that the number of statements that mentioned a specific member of the SST (32 a pedagogue, 15 a psychologist, 11 an educational rehabilitator, 8 a social pedagogue, 3 a speech therapist) is in accordance with the statistics about the size/members of the SST in the teachers' schools. However, it is possible that

an SST member was present, but that the teachers did not decide to ask him/her for help, or they judged that they would need another SST member profile more. A further 12 of the respondents stated that they consulted the SST in general, 2 consulted the principal, 11 a class master, 31 an expert or a colleague outside their school, and 1 parents. Interestingly, 9 of the teachers stated they did not consult anyone, even though (as we checked) they have SST members available in the school, mainly pedagogues and librarians. It is also interesting that only 15.3% of the teachers answered that the information they received from the person they contacted was adequate, with the rest answering either that it was inadequate or they were not sure.

Discussion

We will first look in more detail at RQ1, i.e., questions about the previous education of the EFL teachers about inclusion and SWD, which relate to courses on inclusion they had attended during higher education and additional professional development programmes on the topic of teaching SWD. First, since the courses listed by the participants included general courses, the extent to which the topic of teaching SWD was addressed in these courses remains questionable. Second, the finding that more than two-thirds of the respondents had attended at most one course, which is in accordance with previous research presented in the theoretical part (Fišer, 2019; Kahn-Horwitz, 2015; Martan, 2018; McCutchen et al., 2009), certainly highlights an issue that the national education policy and study programmes must seriously and promptly consider.

Since previous research on the role EFL teachers in inclusive education has shown that EFL teachers need additional training to successfully deal with the challenges of teaching SWD (Benko & Martinović, 2021; Jordan et al., 2009; Karamatić-Brčić & Viljac, 2018) and that they are willing to undergo further education (Fišer, 2018; Martan et al., 2017; Reinke & Moseley, 2002; Spratt & Florian, 2013), we did not expect to find that only 14.3% of the participants had attended both a course and a professional development programme about inclusion or SWD. The data can be partially explained by the cohort of older participants, who received almost no training on inclusion during their studies. However, the mean age of the participants was 41.49 years, so they were in their most potent professional period. Although we cannot talk about data correlation in qualitative research, we can make certain observations about the relationship between age, career courses and narratives (Wilhelmy et al., 2022). The aforementioned result is even more worrying if we consider what the opinion and experience of a group of older teachers would be. Such analyses of

separate age groups require additional, future research. Since the newest legal document, the National Plan for Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2021–2027 (Official Gazette, 2021), sets the improvement of the education of SWD and the professional development of teachers in developing IEPs as priorities, we assume that also this cohort will soon have an opportunity to attend appropriate training. As Nijakowska stated (2019), attending programmes of this kind could raise teachers' awareness and develop positive attitudes, particularly regarding ways of adapting teaching materials and evaluation procedures, but such programmes can also affect teacher confidence.

Regarding RQ2, which concerned teachers' experiences with teaching SWD, it was no surprise that the respondents felt most prepared to work with children with SLD, since most of them had experience with students with precisely this type of difficulty. The result that needs to be discussed is the fact that teachers' opinions on intellectual disabilities diverge. Although the EFL teachers surveyed felt most prepared to work with children with SLD, they also regarded such work as the most challenging teaching experience (the two other disabilities mentioned as the most difficult in terms of providing inclusive teaching were autism and behaviour difficulties). It would be interesting to ask additional questions in this regard, as we can only assume that more dramatic anecdotal experiences lie in the background. Moreover, the respondents extensively elaborated the competences required by an EFL teacher for teaching SWD. The fact that several of the participants freely demonstrated their misunderstanding of inclusive education (calling it a joke, impossible, wizardry, etc.) does not surprise us. However, one would assume that the legal framework, which has been in place for almost two decades, would change the mindset of education workers, and that the belief that education is considered a non-negotiable human right and not an act of goodwill would be accepted. On the other hand, obeying the law does not remove the right to point out its flaws. If we exclude such pessimistic responses, we can speak about unexpectedly elaborated and well-structured answers. This leads us to conclude that the teachers are fully aware of their responsibility and their inappropriate education, and that they are consequently dissatisfied with the way inclusion is carried out, which is in accordance with the several aforementioned national and foreign research studies (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Bouillet, 2013; Kranjčec Mlinarić et al., 2016). Such detailed answers reaffirm the fact that teachers are unfairly labelled as those who "hamper the development of quality inclusive education" (Bouillet, 2019).

In addressing RQ3, which concerns the kind of support teachers receive in their schools, we must first reflect on the size of SSTs and irregularities of

their member profiles, which is in accordance with the previously presented results of Švegar et al. (2020). In addition, statements in which teachers expressed doubts about the competence of the two most represented SST members (pedagogue and librarian) clearly point to the following well-known and ubiquitous national problem: although the law states that a pedagogue, among numerous other inclusive assignments, should identify and monitor SWD as well as advising and helping teachers (Official Gazette, 2014), the professional impact of pedagogues is limited by their own education (their study programmes typically have three inclusive courses, often elective) and the specific context of their educational institution (e.g., the number of students, the number of SWD, the profile of other SST members, insufficiently coordinated and available cooperation with external specialised institutions and mobile expert teams, etc.). Future research should therefore focus solely on EFL teachers working in schools with incomplete teams without education-rehabilitation experts in order to obtain more precise answers regarding why teachers perceive the support from SST as insufficient, what their mutual expectations are, and what they see as more coordinated help from the system in general. Although there were many valuable statements, we conclude the discussion with one that best represents the aforementioned situation:

> "It all boils down to the good will of the teachers, because due to the lack of people in the SST (we only have a pedagogue, despite 736 students in the school), the teachers cannot do everything by themselves and are mostly left to their own devices after being informed that they have a student with difficulties in the class." (P87)

Conclusion

As inclusion laws in many European countries require the least restrictive educational settings for SWD, many such students, as Nijakowska (2014) points out, find themselves in regular educational settings where they attend EFL classes. In practice, however, neither inclusion laws nor language-learning policies specifically address the language learning needs of SWD. As Portelli and Koneeny (2018) note, in such circumstances one should regain the gradually eroded courage to address impediments and concerns, while advocating for inclusivity in classrooms. The present paper outlines a range of impediments and concerns of EFL teachers. Our results confirm the findings of previous research that teachers are not sufficiently formally educated during their studies, while also highlighting the lack of attendance of professional training. Speaking

about experiences and competences in teaching SWD, the participants' extensively elaborated answers reveal an awareness of their responsibility, but also a dissatisfaction with the way inclusion is implemented (especially in relation to the support of the SST). Such results demonstrate that the teachers are aware and motivated, but also sufficiently courageous to address these impediments. At the same time, the (non)fulfilment of the expected inclusive assignments of the EFL teachers regarding SWD, the (dis)satisfaction with their implementation level or the (poor) quality of the achieved results can easily be explained by the teachers' insufficient education or by shifting responsibility to various other 'parties' (the system, SST, teachers or parents). However, a series of in-depth, authentic answers testify to the EFL teachers' awareness and their tendency to build their own sense of responsibility for transformative action in their own specific professional environment. Some of these environments seem disappointing, some inspiring, but they all have the same underlying need for stronger support and coordination of the system.

The present study is not without limitations. It was conducted on an appropriate, unequal sample of 66 primary and 32 secondary EFL teachers. Conducting broader research with equal samples of participants is recommended, but also within the same level of the education system. Some limitations also arose due to the absence of a question about the total number of students in the participants' school, which meant that observations about the appropriate size of the SST and the profile of its members could not be made. The last limitation we would like to mention is that some of the questions about adjustments were simply too broad, or perhaps not entirely suitable, even for a qualitative questionnaire.

Despite its limitations, the present study could be a solid starting point for further research on a specific category of SWD in order to formulate more specific guidelines. As already mentioned, focusing solely on EFL teachers working in schools with incomplete teams without education-rehabilitation experts would also be beneficial. In addition, future lines of research may also consider additional techniques of an exploratory research design, such as interviews or focus groups, since there was no possibility to set additional questions, especially when the teachers' opinions diverged (e.g., readiness to work with students with intellectual disabilities). The techniques of a correlational research design could also be considered. Based primarily on a mostly qualitative questionnaire, the present research effectively filled the identified research gap and laid solid groundwork for the aforementioned possible directions.

Disclosure Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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