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The specialisation ,Hungarian Language for Foreign Children‘ at Kaposvár University

Follow-up survey

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In this paper a study will be presented that was performed among the students at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Kaposvár University. The first part of the research was conducted in 2015–2016 and published in 2016.¹ In that research, the focus was on the students’ expectations at Kaposvár University when joining the specialisation program ‘Hungarian as a foreign language’. The second survey, which I will present in this paper, was a follow-up study after the students finished the program. The main aim of the research was to observe how their experiences met their expectations. Several changes were recognised, such as the change in the students’ plans for the future or in their views on their own mother tongue.

1. Introduction

The education of teachers of Hungarian as a foreign language focused mainly on teaching methodologies for adult language learners for the majority of the past decades. These teacher trainees were educated at the faculties of humanities at Hungarian universities. For kindergarten, primary school or special education teacher trainees, training as an HFL teacher was not available. However, over the past few decades, more and more young language learners began to appear in the Hungarian education system, and so the HFL teachers also needed to acquire the skills necessary to teach primary school pupils.²

Recognising this gap between existing training and the of teaching foreign children of all ages, the Faculty of Pedagogy of Kaposvár

¹ Nagyházi 2016.

² Csonka 2006.

University started a special teaching program for kindergarten, primary school and special education teacher trainees that enabled them to manage the integration and language education of foreign/immigrant pupils in their classes.

Before the start of this program, the incoming students were asked to fill in a questionnaire and answer questions about their reason(s) for joining the course, its usefulness, the skills they want to obtain, and their further plans regarding the program. The results of this survey were published by the author in 2016.³

In 2017, from January to June, a new survey was carried out among the students who had finished the specialisation in 2016–2017. In this period 28 students finished their studies in this field; most of them had already finished their studies at the university as well. They were asked to complete a new questionnaire that contained similar questions to the first one. The main aim of this research was to find out whether the skills and the experiences students gained during the program met their expectations and whether the students' future plans and their opinion of the HFL teaching profession changed in general. In this paper some of the results of the survey performed in 2015–2016 will be presented in comparison with this particular survey.

2. Circumstances of the study

The 2017 research was carried out between January and June of the same year: in January I interviewed students who had already finished their education, and in June, fresh graduates. The questionnaires were sent directly to the students over the internet, and I guaranteed anonymity to them throughout the whole process. Of the 28 students contacted, 16 filled in and sent the questionnaire back (57 %). The distribution was the following: 2 teacher trainees of the 3rd year, 8 teacher trainees of the 4th year, 4 special education teacher trainees of the 3rd year and two future teachers who did not specify their university year.

³ Nagyházi 2016.

The questionnaire contained 11 questions: four regarding the students' future plans connected to the specialisation, for example in the labour market, (questions 1, 2, 4, and 5); three regarding the practicality of the skill set taught in the specialisation (questions 6, 7, and 8); two regarding their experiences of the HFL teaching practice (questions 3 and 10); and two inquiring about their attitude towards the specialisation (questions 9 and 11). Questions 1, 3 and 4 were multiple-choice questions, while the others were open-ended.

3. The results of the study

3.1 The usefulness of the specialisation regarding future plans (Questions 1, 2, 4, and 5)

In question 1, students could judge whether they would be able to use the skills learned, and in question 2 they could elaborate how. The majority of students (12 respondents, 80 %) were certain that the skills obtained would be useful for them in the future, 3 students (20 %) were unsure, and 1 respondent did not answer the question (fig. 1).

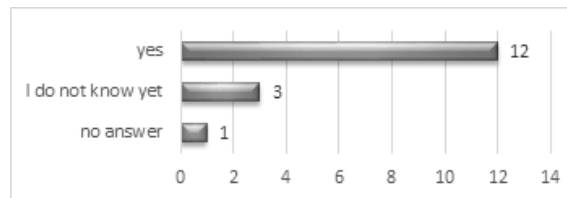


Figure 1. Will you use the knowledge acquired in the future? (Question 1)

When asked to provide a specific example (question 2), some students stressed that they wanted to teach non-Hungarian children arriving in the country (5 respondents). 3 students gave a more generic answer: they wanted to use their skills in their future job. For another 3 students, the utility of the teaching methodology was the most significant, 2 respondents wanted to teach Hungarian abroad, and 2 would rather make use of their skills when teaching in another field. 1 respondent answered that their knowledge of the mother tongue

broadened, and that they would utilise this later on, and another that the new skills were useful when teaching another language. One student used the 'other' category to note that their new workplace gave them the task of developing foreign children's language skills (fig. 2).

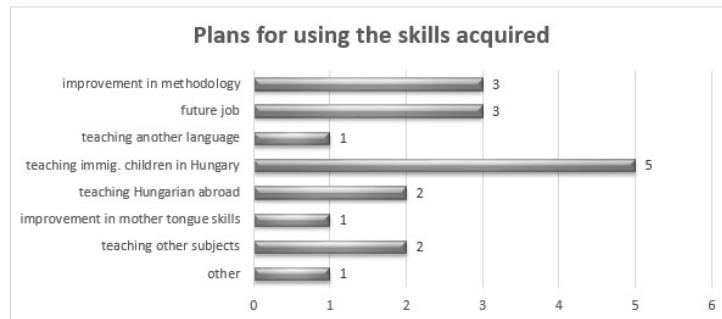


Figure 2. How will you use the skills acquired? (Question 2)

Looking back at the first survey carried out in 2015–2016, at the start of the specialisation, 8 students (22 %) could not tell whether the knowledge obtained in the course would be useful, and another 4 (11 %) did not answer this question. This makes 33 % of students unsure about the effectiveness of the specialisation. 8 people (22 %) wanted to teach children Hungarian in Hungary, 2 students (5 %) wanted to teach a foreign friend, and 1 (3 %) imagined a future as a private tutor, also in Hungary — so 30 % of the students planned to pursue their Hungarian language teacher career in Hungary. In the follow-up survey, the uncertainty dropped to 20 %; furthermore, 5 students (28 %) plan to teach children, and 1 student (6 %) is already a practising teacher.

In question 4 the students answered whether the knowledge learned in the specialisation would be relevant in their long-term plans, and in the open-ended question 5, they were asked to describe these plans (fig. 3 and 4). In figure 3 we can observe that 10 students

have specific plans in the field of Hungarian teaching, 5 are unsure and 1 student has not provided an answer.

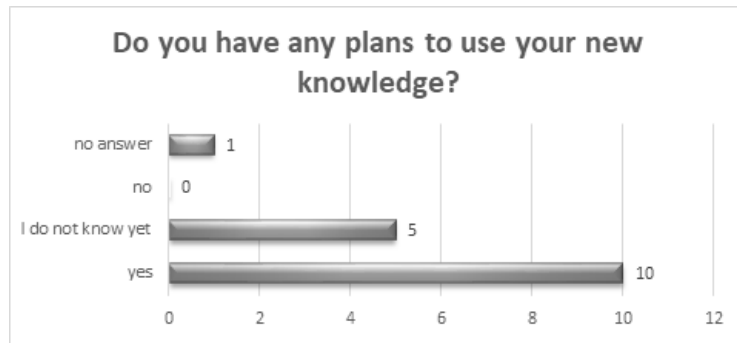


Figure 3. Do you have any plans to use your new knowledge? (Question 4)

The use of this acquired knowledge divided the students: a majority responded again that they wanted to teach children coming to Hungary (5 respondents), out of which 2 wrote down that in their current jobs they were already given such a task. 2 students would also agree to teach foreign adults. 3 students wanted to teach children abroad, and another 2 would teach adults. 1 student concluded that the knowledge could be utilised in their work in general (fig. 4).



Figure 4. What plans do you have regarding teaching Hungarian? (Question 5)

Comparing the results with our conclusions from the 2015–2016 study, we can see that the students' future plans changed significantly: at the start of the specialisation, 6 people (22 %) imagined their future as a Hungarian teacher in Hungary, and 11 of them (39 %) abroad. In the follow-up study, 7 respondents (42 %) want to teach in Hungary, and only 5 (30 %) are planning to go abroad.

3.2 Useful skills acquired during the specialisation

The next three questions shed light on which competences students think are important in Hungarian teaching (question 6), in their future job in general (question 8), and how much and in what fields this specialisation has contributed to the development of their own pedagogical competences (question 7).

Looking at question 6, (What kind of useful skills did you acquire that you could use while teaching Hungarian?) it is clear that students found the use of games in teaching the most important (10 responses). 3 people felt they had learned helpful skills in teaching grammar, 2 people were given new ideas for their everyday job, and 1 person voted for presenting new learning material and for teaching methodology in general. Besides this, 1 student stressed enthusiasm for and determination in teaching Hungarian: "I believe that there exists a level of enthusiasm and determination that can make teaching Hungarian effective"⁴ (T/4. respondent) (fig. 5).

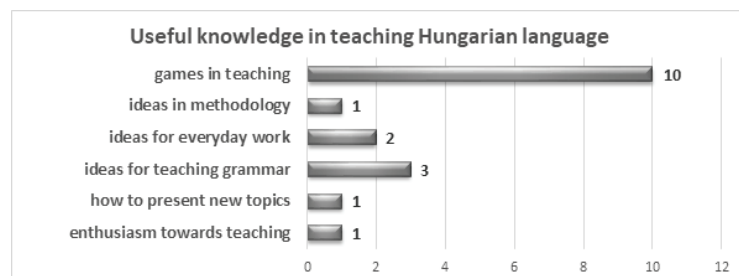


Figure 5. Useful knowledge in teaching Hungarian language (Question 6)

⁴ Translated by the author.

During the specialisation, the students are not granted an HFL diploma; their main training is as a primary teacher, a kindergarten teacher or a special needs teacher. In question 7 the students were asked to explain how their newly acquired knowledge could be utilised in their job in the field of pedagogy.

The usage of games was once again a popular answer: 6 students considered this to be the most important one. 6 other students felt they had got help for teaching reading comprehension (to native speakers). 4 students thought these newly acquired skills were useful in teaching in general. 2 students each thought they were helpful in teaching another foreign language, or in planning the teaching process. 1 student gained experience in making teaching aids (fig. 6).

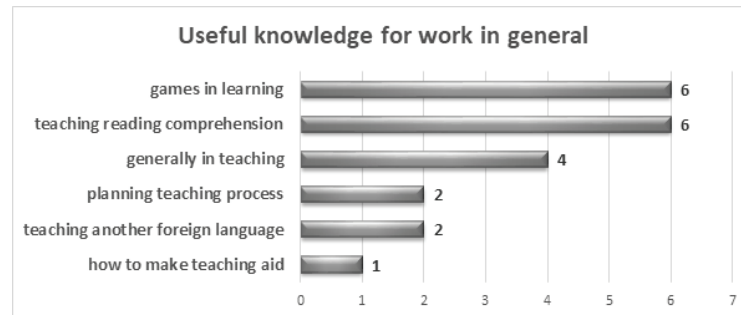


Figure 6. What knowledge will be useful in your job? (Question 7)

Question 8 asked which pedagogical competences the specialisation contributed to developing. The respondents could give multiple answers. The majority (6 respondents) emphasised the knowledge of teaching methodology. 3 other students are more fearless when teaching, and another 3 feel they are more confident handling unexpected situations. 2 students each highlighted making teaching aids, getting a grasp on successful teaching, or the necessity of self-improvement. 1 student mentioned being more open towards other people and teaching in general (fig. 7).

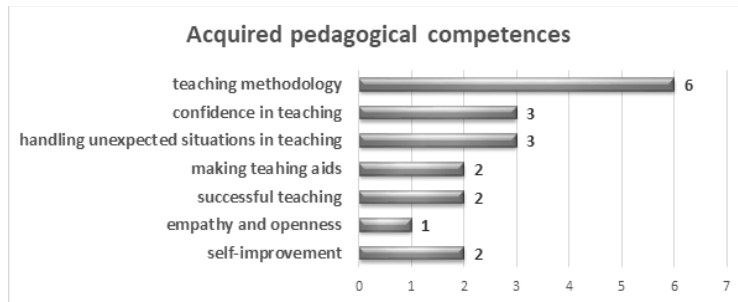


Figure 7. What pedagogical competences have you acquired? (Question 8)

In the previous survey,⁵ there was only one question about pedagogical competences. Before starting their studies in the program, the students were asked about the competences they might acquire during the program. As this field of language teaching is not a well-known one in Hungary, with a small amount of foreign children in the kindergartens and primary schools, most of the students did not know what this kind of profession meant or what benefits they could acquire by finishing this specialisation.

A large percentage could not properly comprehend the question, and gave only more generic answers which could not be evaluated, e.g., “what I will want to use” (GYP10),⁶ “I will be able to teach children Hungarian” (OP1). One student openly admitted: “I do not know what to expect” (GYP11). In figure 8 we can see that even those who seemingly answered the question did not give specific answers. A vast majority (17 respondents, 51 %) noted that they expected to be able to teach Hungarian language, but did not mention any specific competences. It was also typical that students did not name skills but rather elements of knowledge: 9 students expected to get help with teaching in general, and 5 wanted to learn “something new”.

⁵ Nagyházi 2016.

⁶ Translated by the author.

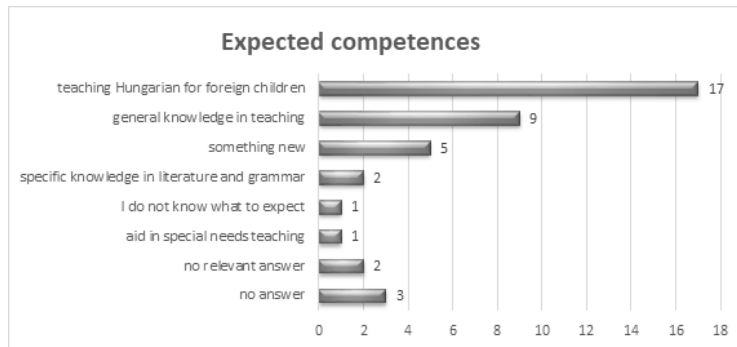


Figure 8. Expected competences in the 2015–2016 survey

Comparing these results to the ones of the newer survey, we can observe that the students did indeed get help with teaching Hungarian, primarily with using games and in the field of developing text comprehension, and were able to list actual pedagogical skills, like confidence in teaching, handling unexpected situations, or openness and empathy.

3.3 Teaching practice

In the third group of questions, the students indicated whether they had already given lessons (i.e., if they have worked as a Hungarian teacher since the beginning of the specialisation), and described the experiences they had with the teaching practice they had had under the specialisation. 9 respondents had not yet had the chance to teach Hungarian, 1 did not answer the question, 4 students teach adults and 2 teach children Hungarian (fig. 9).



Figure 9. Have you been teaching Hungarian since finishing the program? (Question 3)

In the fourth and last semester of the specialisation, each student had to give one lesson to a group of foreign students at our university. This practical lesson was preceded by an observation in each semester, and in this last semester, directly before their teaching practice, the teacher trainees took part in two classes to get to know the foreign students' level of Hungarian knowledge, the material they would be expected to teach, and the types of methods known by the foreign students. Question 10 asked about the students' experiences regarding this practice.

Answering this question, 6 students noted that they were afraid of using the common language — in this case, English — as they felt their knowledge of the language was not up to a certain standard. Despite this, all of the students concluded that communication — both in English and Hungarian — was fluent. Before the beginning of the practice, 2 people considered the task more difficult than it ended up being for them, 2 were outright scared of teaching, and only 1 indicated that they felt prepared and did not have any anxieties before teaching. 1 student emphasised that this lesson required a lot of planning and preparation. 5 other respondents noted that the observations contributed greatly to planning and conducting the lesson, 4 respondents stated that teaching in action calmed them, and 5 enjoyed the practice (fig. 10).



Figure 10. Teaching experiences during the school practice (Question 10)

3.4 Evaluation of the specialisation (Questions 9 and 11)

Two questions (questions 9 and 11) of the survey asked how satisfied the students were with the contents of the specialisation. Question 9 inquired about the most-liked courses. A majority of the students (10 respondents) liked the teaching methodology course the most. The 'Fairy tales and poetry' course was also mentioned 4 times. The courses on 'Functional grammar' and 'Bilingualism' were each liked by 2 people. 'Teaching practice' and 'Observation in the classroom' proved to be the favourite courses of the group (fig. 11).

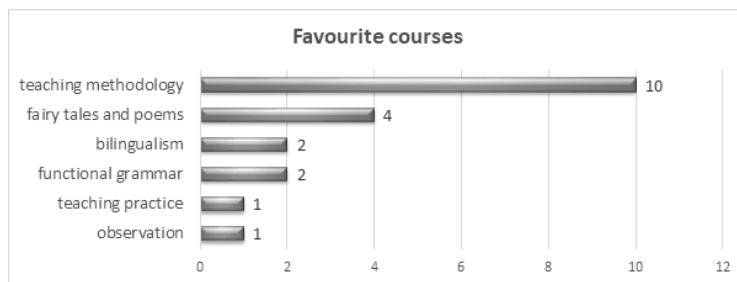


Figure 11. Favourite courses during the specialisation (own edition)

In question 11, students could suggest changes in the course. 3 students gave no reply, but others elaborated their opinion in detail, and

so 15 suggestions were made in total. 4 respondents were satisfied with the contents of the course.

A vast majority of the suggestions (8 respondents) were connected to more teaching practice. 4 students also noted that they would gladly take part in more observations, although 2 of them added that this was made available to them at any time. 1 student wanted more methodology classes, and another one would want to visit institutions where foreign children were taught; yet another would like to attend lectures given by acclaimed professionals of HFL teaching.

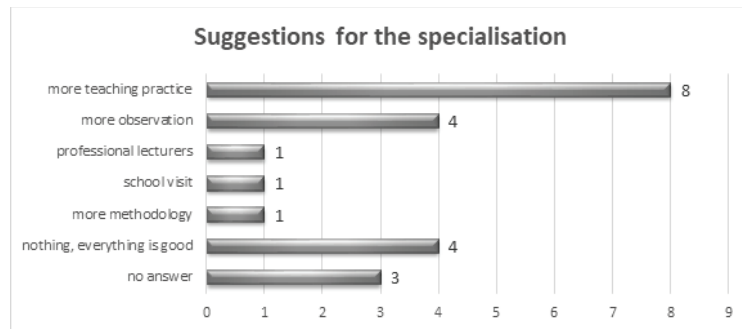


Figure 12. Suggestions for the specialisation (Question 11)

4. The future of the specialisation

In 2017, the HFL specialisation was not run by Kaposvár University, as starting from 2017, specialisations are only available in a rotary fashion. In 2018, every specialisation of the Faculty of Pedagogy was revised. The concept of the faculty is to deliver the educational contents offered to students on three levels, in the form of elective courses, extra modules available during education, and post-graduate specialist training courses.

In 2019, the training which provides support for teachers teaching foreigners Hungarian will be renewed. The elective course has started every semester since 2009; this will be complemented later by the *'Teaching Hungarian for Foreign Children'* course starting in the autumn semester of 2019, which will be worth 30 credits. The

module — which will be put in place instead of the specialisation — contains quite a few changes: some of the previous courses will be cancelled and the most useful and successful courses will be available in the program. Besides teaching methodology, the new module '*Teaching Hungarian for Foreign Children*' will contain courses that are missing from the foundational education of the students but still necessary for teaching HFL, such as bilingualism or children's literature in foreign language teaching.

In the future, the methodology of HFL is planned to be incorporated in the continuing education of teachers. Nowadays, the development of the teaching material is in process and the program is being planned. This special program can help teachers be prepared for the challenges of integrating foreign children in the Hungarian system of education.

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