

Croatian as a Second Language – Faculty of Teacher Education Students' Views

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Abstract

Today Međimurje County has some 11,000 inhabitants belonging to the Roma national minority, with about 1,400 Roma pupils attending primary education and amounting up to 13% of the pupils in Međimurje (<http://www.medjimurska-zupanija.hr/najnovije/u-predskolu-krenula-nova-generacija-ucenika-roma>).

Research in language and education shows that Roma pupils have insufficient or no knowledge of the Croatian language upon their enrolment into primary school. This makes it difficult for them to attend regular classes (Cvikić, 2007; Cvikić & Petroska, 2013; Turza-Bogdan & Ciglar, 2010). The education of the pupils at such an early age depends heavily on their teachers' competences; most of all the linguistic and teaching competences. We set out to investigate the attitudes of the Faculty of Teacher Education students on the issue of the education of Roma pupils that is carried out in Croatian, which is their second language. To investigate the issue we presented primary and preschool education students with a questionnaire prepared for the purposes of the study. The responses of the selected sample of students present their opinions and attitudes on the education of the Roma pupils, and point to the necessary increase in the future teachers' linguistic and teaching competences.

We conclude by presenting some options to improve the quality of education of primary and preschool teachers with respect to the acquisition of Croatian as a second or foreign language as its crucial element.

Key words: *Croatian as a second language; Roma national minority.*

Introduction

According to the latest statistical report (2013), 90% of the population in the Republic of Croatia are Croatian nationals, while 96% of the people state that

Croatian is their mother tongue. The rest of the population belongs to one of the national minorities (Serbian, Bosniak, Albanian, Roma, Czech, Italian and Slovenian). National minorities live in various areas of the country. Already in the 19th century, Međimurje County started to be populated by residents who declare themselves as belonging to the Roma national minority. Their mother tongue is Boyash Romanian, which is a Romanian dialect that has kept some archaic elements due to geographical isolation and rare contact with the Romanian language. Therefore, it is a reflection of a historical dialectal state of the Boyash Romanian dialect, while it simultaneously bears certain interferences of the Croatian language as the language of the environment (Radosavljević, 2009).

Today Međimurje County has some 11,000 inhabitants belonging to the Roma national minority, with about 1,400 Roma pupils attending primary education and amounting up to 13% of the pupils in Međimurje (<http://www.medjimurska-zupanija.hr/najnovije/u-predskolu-krenula-nova-generacija-ucenika-roma>). Eight schools in Međimurje County are attended by up to 60% of the Roma pupils. Croatian is their second language as Boyash Romanian is a minority language in the Republic of Croatia. “Minority language is a language traditionally in use in a certain country. Minority language speakers use their mother tongue in their families and everyday lives, e.g. in Romani settlements.” (Jelaska, 2005, p. 55).

According to Jelaska (2005), some speakers may have Croatian as their second or foreign language without having mastered its standard idiom. Pupils of the Roma national minority belong to this speaker profile as Romani pupils (alongside the adult members of the Romani minority) use no other language but their mother tongue until the moment they start school. Naturally, if they continue to live in an environment which only or mostly uses their mother tongue (Romani), Croatian will become no more than the language they use at school.

The Primary School Curriculum (MZOŠ, *Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia*, 2006) does not make reference to the necessary differences in the teaching of the pupils whose mother tongue is not Croatian; on the other hand, the Roma national minority is not represented in any of the models of learning about one’s own language and culture. Education in the minority language is reflected in the educational models A, B or C according to which each national minority chooses how they wish to nurture their language and culture in relation to Croatian as the majority language. Members of the Roma minority are only offered special programmes in the forms of various workshops and ways of nurturing their culture which do not make part of the current educational curricula. The Ministry of Science and Education is carrying out the National Programme for the Roma People and the Action Plan of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (<http://public.mzos.hr/Default.aspx?sec=3154>).

In short, all the pupils in Croatia, no matter what their mother tongue is, are included into the same educational process and work according to the same curriculum which prescribes the targeted educational achievements at a given grade level. Numerous

problems have been identified in the education of the Roma national minority, which have been greatly conditioned by the fact that the pupils do not know the language of the educational process, i.e. the Croatian language. This situation gives rise to the issue of equal accessibility of such education to all the children. This problem has been recognized by the academic community, so that the level of proficiency in the Croatian language in Roma pupils and the process of the acquisition of Croatian as a second or foreign language have been studied intensively over the past twenty years (Cvikić & Jelaska, 2005; Cvikić & Kuvač, 2005; Jelaska, 2003, 2005, 2012; Turza-Bogdan & Ciglar, 2010).

Research on the level of acquisition of the Croatian language in Roma preschool children has found that this population lags behind the children whose mother tongue is Croatian. The Boyash-speaking pupils from Međimurje have limited ability to communicate in the Međimurje dialect, while their first encounter with the Croatian language occurs upon starting school (Dobravac, Cvikić, & Kuvač-Kraljević, 2011). At the same time, due to scarce contacts with the Romanian language and culture, their level of the acquisition of the Boyash Romani language is also low. The obligatory preschool education (3 – 10 months) has been found to be insufficient to help these children to achieve the appropriate proficiency level in the Croatian language, such that would allow them to learn and participate in their classes equally well as the pupils whose mother tongue is Croatian. This has been confirmed in the reports of their teachers and by means of class observation.

The Republic of Croatia has set a legal framework within which obligatory procedures must be carried out for the inclusion of children with insufficient knowledge of the Croatian language into the country's educational system. There is a document entitled *The Regulations on carrying out preparatory and remedial classes for pupils with insufficient or no proficiency in the Croatian language as well as the classes on the mother tongue and culture of the pupils' country of origin*. Its application should be based on the investigation of the level of Croatian language mastery. According to the available data, only one standardized test has been made to test children who have insufficient or no knowledge of the Croatian language upon enrolment into the first grade of primary school. However, there are no records of whether it is being used in schools and no results of such testing are available.

Methodology

Research Aim

The research on the level of mastery of the mother tongue that has been done so far has shown that language development continues throughout the early school age (Kuvač, 2007).

The general aim of this study was to investigate the views of future primary and preschool teachers on teaching pupils who belong to the Roma national minority. We were interested in learning the following:

- the students' knowledge on the issue of the education of Roma pupils in Croatian as a second language,
- the students' attitudes to and opinions on the competences they would need to develop in the course of their studies to enable them to provide future solutions to the issue of the Roma minority pupils' education.

With regard to the general aim of the study, additional aims were set to investigate whether there were any differences in the students' knowledge on the hereby described issue with respect to the type of the study programme they had enrolled, their location and year of study. The students' opinions and differences thereof were investigated as they were asked about their encounter with the Roma pupils, which had taken place as part of their teaching practice course; they were asked if they were prepared to learn the Boyash Romanian language, accept a teaching position at a school attended by Roma pupils, what their knowledge of the existing situation on the education of the Roma national minority with regard to Croatian as the language of schooling and their mother tongue, and the curriculum was.

Sample

Students of the Faculty of Teacher Education of the University of Zagreb took part in the study (N=304).

The sample consisted of 260 (85.5%) students of the Integrated Undergraduate and Graduate University Study for Primary Teacher Education and 44 (14.5%) students of the Undergraduate University Study Early Childhood and Preschool Education. In the tables below and further in the text they will be marked as the primary and preschool education studies.

The Faculty of Teacher Education operates at three locations: Zagreb (Zagreb County), Čakovec (Međimurje County) and Petrinja (Sisak-Moslavina County). With regard to the location of their study the sample consisted of 137 (45.1%) students from the main branch in Zagreb, 120 (39.5%) students from the local branch in Čakovec and 47 (15.5%) students from the local branch in Petrinja.

With regard to the year of study the sample was comprised of 55 (18.1%) first, 47 (15.5%) second, 54 (17.8%) third, 64 (21.1%) fourth and 84 (27.6%) fifth year students.

Research Problems

The following research problems were addressed:

The first research problem was to investigate if there was a statistically significant difference between the students of different study groups, locations and years of study upon the occasion of their meeting the Roma minority pupils in the course of their teaching practice.

The second research problem involved finding out how willing the students were to learn the Romani language. Their responses were compared with respect to their different study groups, locations and years of study.

The third research problem was to investigate whether the students were willing to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils speak the Romani language.

The students' responses were compared with respect to their different study groups, locations and years of study.

The fourth research problem was to investigate if the students were aware of the pupils' various knowledge levels of the Croatian language. Their responses were compared with respect to their different study groups, locations and years of study.

The fifth research problem was to investigate the students' knowledge of the conditions the pupils of the Roma minority are being educated in. Their responses were compared with respect to their different study groups, locations and years of study.

The sixth problem involved finding out whether the students were aware of the fact that knowing the pupils' mother tongue facilitates access to them. Their responses were compared with respect to their different study groups, locations and years of study.

The seventh problem was aimed at investigating if the students were willing to accept a teaching position at a school in which Croatian is not most pupils' mother tongue. Their responses were compared with respect to their different study groups, locations and years of study.

Instrument

The students' opinions were investigated by means of a questionnaire comprised of 11 questions. The first three questions inquired about the study programme the students had enrolled (primary or preschool education studies), their study location (Zagreb, Čakovec, Petrinja) and study year (years one to five). The subsequent questions inquired about the students' opinions on teaching the Roma pupils. The fourth question was the following: "Roma pupils make up 13% of the school children population in Međimurje. Have you encountered the Roma minority pupils in the course of your teaching practice?" The possible answers to this question were either yes or no. The fifth question was the following: "Should you be given an opportunity to learn the Romani language, would you be prepared to do so?" The answers to this question were provided on a three-level scale (1 – Yes, 2 – No, 3 – I do not know). The sixth was the following question: "Would you accept a teaching position at a school in which most pupils speak Romani?" The answers to this question were provided on a three-level scale (1 – Yes, 2 – No, 3 – I do not know). The seventh question was: "Do you think that Roma children speak Croatian equally well as the Croatian pupils when they enrol primary school?" The possible answers to this question were either yes or no. The eighth question was: "Do you think that a specially designed curriculum could help ease the education of the pupils who speak Croatian as a second language?" The answers to this question were provided on a three-level scale (1 – Yes, 2 – No, 3 – I do not know). The ninth question was: "Do you think that the knowledge of the Romani language would be useful to future primary and preschool teachers should they accept teaching positions in schools attended by Roma national minority pupils?" (1 – Yes, 2 – No, 3 – I do not know). The tenth question was: "Would you accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue?" (1 – Yes, 2 – No, 3 – I do not know).

The fourth question was used to investigate the first research problem, the fifth question was aimed at answering the second research problem, the sixth question was aimed at answering the third, the seventh question the fourth, the eighth question the fifth, the ninth question the sixth, and the tenth question was asked to provide answers to the seventh research problem.

The Yates-corrected chi-square contingency-table test was used to analyze the results. The SPSS statistical program was used for this purpose.

Procedure

Primary and preschool education studies students completed the online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Before completing the questionnaire, the participants were asked to read the accompanying information explaining how anonymous data would be handled.

Results

Out of the total sample 33.9% of the students have encountered Roma national minority pupils in the course of their teaching practice, while some two thirds (66.1%) of the participants have not encountered this population of pupils (Table 1). The Yates-corrected chi-square test (2x2 table, 1 degree of freedom) shows a small statistically significant difference ($\chi^2=10.645$; $df=1$; $p=0.001$; $phi=0.196$) in the encounter with the Roma pupils in the course of the teaching practice with respect to the participants' study groups (Table 1). In other words, teacher education studies students have encountered Roma children more (37.7%) in the course of their teaching practice than the preschool teacher education students (11.4%).

Table 1

Differences in the frequency of encountering Roma national minority pupils in the course of the teaching practice with respect to the participants' study groups

Study group	Encounter with Roma national minority pupils in the course of the teaching practice		Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	
Primary education studies	98 (37.7)	162 (62.3)	260 (85.5)
Preschool education studies	5 (11.4)	39 (88.6)	44 (14.5)
Total f(%)	103 (33.9)	201 (66.1)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) between the participants with respect to their encountering Roma national minority pupils in the course of their teaching practice ($\chi^2=1.775$; $df=2$; $phi=0.412$) according to their study locations (Table 2). Students from all three locations (Čakovec, Zagreb and Petrinja) mostly do not encounter Roma pupils, with no differences in the participants' answers with respect to their study locations. More than half of the answers to this question were negative.

Table 2

Differences in the frequency of encountering Roma national minority pupils in the course of the teaching practice with respect to the participants' study locations

Study location	Encounter with Roma national minority pupils in the course of the teaching practice		Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	
Čakovec	44 (36.7)	76 (63.3)	120 (39.5)
Zagreb	41 (30)	96 (70)	137 (45)
Petrinja	18 (38.2)	29 (62)	47 (15.5)
Total	103 (33.9)	201 (66.1)	304 (100)

A statistically significant difference was found in the students' responses ($p < 0.05$) when they were compared with regard to their year of study ($\chi^2=31.46$; $df=4$; $phi=0.000$). Students who were nearing the end of their studies (years four and five) knew significantly more about the problems Roma pupils face in the Croatian education system in comparison with their younger colleagues. First year students knew the least about the topic (Table 3).

Table 3

Differences in the frequency of encountering Roma national minority pupils in the course of the teaching practice with respect to the participants' years of study

Year of study	Encounter with Roma national minority pupils in the course of the teaching practice		Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	
Year One	4 (7.3)	51 (92.7)	55 (18)
Year Two	14 (29.8)	33 (70.2)	47 (15.5)
Year Three	18 (33.3)	36 (66.7)	54 (17.8)
Year Four	31 (48.4)	33 (51.6)	64 (21)
Year Five	36 (42.9)	48 (57.1)	84 (27.7)
Total f(%)	103 (33.9)	201 (66.1)	304 (100)

One fourth (25%) of the students expressed willingness to learn the Romani language, less than a half of them (40.5%) would not learn it, and about one third (34.5%) of the participants were indecisive on the matter (Table 4). No statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) was found in their responses ($\chi^2=0.380$; $df=1$; $phi=0.827$), which generally portrayed the students' lack of willingness to learn the Romani language.

Table 4

Differences in the participants' willingness to learn the Romani language with respect to the participants' study groups

Study group	Willingness to learn the Romani language			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Primary education studies	67 (25.8)	102 (39.2)	91 (35)	260 (85.6)
Preschool education studies	9 (20.4)	21 (47.8)	14 (31.9)	44 (14.4)
Total f(%)	76 (25)	123 (40.5)	105 (34.5)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) in the participants' willingness to learn the Romani language with respect to their study locations ($\chi^2=2.087$; $df=4$; $p=0.720$). In other words, regardless of whether the students study in Čakovec, Zagreb or Petrinja, approximately one quarter of them would be willing to learn the Romani language, two fifths would not learn it, and approximately one third of the participants are indecisive (Table 5).

Table 5

Differences in the participants' willingness to learn the Romani language with respect to the participants' study locations

Study location	Willingness to learn the Romani language			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Čakovec	32 (26.7)	45 (37.5)	43 (35.8)	120 (39.5)
Zagreb	33 (24.1)	55 (40.1)	49 (35.8)	137 (45.1)
Petrinja	11 (23.4)	23 (48.9)	13 (27.7)	47 (15.5)
Total f(%)	76 (25)	123 (40.5)	105 (34.5)	304 (100)

The analysis shows (Table 6) no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) in the participants' responses with regard to their years of study ($\chi^2=2.306$; $df=4$; $phi=0.680$). There are many students from all five study years who are indecisive (response: I do not know).

Table 6

Differences in the participants' willingness to learn the Romani language with respect to the participants' study years

Year of study	Willingness to learn the Romani language			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Year One	14 (24.4)	26 (47.2)	15 (27.3)	55 (18.1)
Year Two	10 (21.3)	20 (42.5)	17 (36.1)	47 (15.5)
Year Three	12 (22.2)	27 (50)	15 (27.8)	54 (17.8)
Year Four	20 (31.2)	21 (32.9)	23 (35.6)	64 (21)
Year Five	20 (23.9)	29 (34.5)	35 (41.7)	84 (27.5)
Total f(%)	76 (25)	123 (40.5)	105 (34.6)	304 (100)

As concerns the question of the participants' willingness to accept a teaching position in a school where most pupils speak the Romani language, about one third of the students would accept the position, one fifth of them would not accept it and about one half of the students are indecisive. No statistically significant difference was found in their answers ($p > 0.05$) with respect to the participants' study groups ($\chi^2=2.306$; $df=4$; $phi=0.680$) (Table 7). There were more positive than negative answers provided by the primary education students and an equal number of positive and negative answers were provided by the preschool education students. However, most participants responded "I do not know".

Table 7

Differences in the participants' willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils speak the Romani language with respect to the participants' study groups

Study group	Willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils speak the Romani language			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Primary education studies	92 (35.4)	47 (18)	121 (46.5)	260 (85.5)
Preschool education studies	10 (22.8)	10 (22.8)	24 (54.5)	44 (14.5)
Total f(%)	102 (33.5)	57 (18.8)	145 (47.7)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) was found when the students' study locations were considered ($\chi^2=0.693$; $df=2$; $phi=0.707$). We found the same trend as in the results provided in Table 7, i.e. there were more positive than negative answers, although most students do not know if they would accept a job at a school where most pupils belong to the Roma national minority (Table 8).

Table 8

Differences in the participants' willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils speak the Romani language with respect to the participants' study locations

Study location	Willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils speak the Romani language			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Čakovec	39 (32.5)	25 (20.9)	56 (46.7)	120 (39.5)
Zagreb	44 (32.1)	23 (16.8)	70 (50.1)	137 (45.1)
Petrinja	19 (40.4)	9 (19.1)	19 (40.4)	47 (15.5)
Total	102 (33.5)	57 (18.8)	145 (47.7)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) between the answers of the students enrolled in different study years ($\chi^2=7.023$; $df=8$; $p=0.534$) with regard to whether they were willing to assume a teaching position in a school where most pupils speak the Romani language. Regardless of their year of study, some 30-40% of the students would be willing to accept a teaching position in schools where most pupils speak the Romani language, approximately 10-20% of them would not accept such a job, while about a half of the students are indecisive on the matter (Table 9).

Table 9

Differences in the participants' willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils speak the Romani language with respect to the participants' study years

Year of study	Willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils speak the Romani language			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Year One	16 (29)	13 (23.6)	26 (47.3)	55 (18.1)
Year Two	16 (34)	11 (23.4)	20 (42.6)	47 (15.5)
Year Three	21 (38.9)	9 (16.7)	24 (44.4)	54 (17.8)
Year Four	26 (40.6)	7 (10.9)	31 (48.4)	54 (21.1)
Year Five	23 (27.4)	17 (20.2)	44 (52.4)	84 (27.6)
Total f(%)	102 (33.6)	57 (18.8)	145 (47.7)	304 (100)

In terms of the participants' awareness of the differences between the Roma and Croatian pupils in their knowledge of the Croatian language, almost all the participating students have shown that they understand that the Roma minority children and Croatian children do not have the same level of the Croatian language knowledge upon enrolment into primary education. Chi-squared test ($X^2=153.47$; $df=1$; $phi=0.272$) was used and no statistically significant difference was found in the participants' answers ($p > 0.05$) when they were compared by their study groups (Table 10).

Table 10

Differences in the participants' awareness of the pupils' knowledge of the Croatian language with respect to their study groups

Study group	Do you think that Roma children speak Croatian equally well as the Croatian pupils when they enrol primary school?		
	No f(%)	Yes f(%)	Total f(%)
Primary education studies	253 (97.3)	7 (2.7)	260 (85.6)
Preschool education studies	44 (100)	0	44 (14.5)
Total f(%)	297 (97.7)	7 (2.3)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) with respect to the study location either ($\chi^2=1.026$; $df=2$; $p=0.599$) (Table 11).

Table 11

Differences in the participants' awareness of the pupils' knowledge of the Croatian language with respect to their study locations

Study location	Do you think that Roma children speak Croatian equally well as the Croatian pupils when they enrol primary school?		
	No f(%)	Yes f(%)	Total f(%)
Čakovec	119 (98.3)	2 (1.7)	121 (39.9)
Zagreb	133 (97.8)	3 (2.2)	136 (44.8)
Petrinja	45 (95.8)	2 (4.2)	47 (15.5)
Total f(%)	297 (97.7)	7 (2.3)	304 (100)

Moreover, no statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) (Table 12) with respect to the participants' year of study ($\chi^2=3.731$; $df=4$; $p=0.444$).

Table 12

Differences in the participants' awareness of the pupils' knowledge of the Croatian language with respect to their study years

Year of study	Do you think that Roma children speak Croatian equally well as the Croatian pupils when they enrol primary school?		
	No f(%)	Yes f(%)	Total f(%)
Year One	52 (94.5)	3 (5.4)	55 (18.1)
Year Two	47 (100)	0	47 (15.5)
Year Three	53 (98.1)	1 (1.9)	54 (17.8)
Year Four	63 (98.4)	1 (1.6)	64 (21)
Year Five	82 (97.7)	2 (2.4)	84 (27.7)
Total f(%)	297 (97.7)	7 (2.3)	304 (100)

More than two thirds of the participants (73.7%) believe that a specially designed curriculum could help pupils who speak Croatian as their second language in their education. About one third of the participants (11.2%) disagree with that proposition or are indecisive (15.1%). The results show (Table 13) no statistically significant difference in the students' answers to this question ($p>0.05$) with respect to their study groups ($\chi^2=8.91$; $df=1$; $p=0.296$).

Table 13

Differences in the participants' opinions on whether a specially designed curriculum is needed to help pupils learn Croatian as a second language with respect to the participants' study groups

Study group	Do you think that a specially designed curriculum could help ease the education of the pupils who speak Croatian as a second language?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know	
Primary education studies	193 (74.2)	30 (11.6)	37 (14.2)	260 (85.6)
Preschool education studies	31 (70.5)	4 (9)	9 (20.5)	44 (14.5)
Total f(%)	224 (73.7)	34 (11.2)	46 (15.1)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) in the participants' responses with regard to their study locations ($\chi^2=1.397$; $df=2$; $p=0.497$) (Table 14).

Table 14

Differences in the participants' opinions on whether a specially designed curriculum is needed to help pupils learn Croatian as a second language with respect to the participants' study locations

Study location	Do you think that a specially designed curriculum could help ease the education of the pupils who speak Croatian as a second language?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Čakovec	93 (76.9)	9 (7.4)	19 (15.8)	121 (39.8)
Zagreb	97 (71.3)	19 (14)	20 (14.7)	136 (44.7)
Petrinja	34 (72.3)	6 (12.8)	7 (14.9)	47 (15.5)
Total f(%)	224 (73.7)	34 (11.2)	46 (15.1)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p>0.05$) in the participants' responses with regard to their year of study ($\chi^2=8.916$; $df=4$; $p=0.063$) (Table 15).

Table 15

Differences in the participants' opinions on whether a specially designed curriculum is needed to help pupils learn Croatian as a second language with respect to the participants' study years

Year of study	Do you think that a specially designed curriculum could help ease the education of the pupils who speak Croatian as a second language?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Year One	39 (70.9)	2 (3.6)	14 (25.4)	55 (18)
Year Two	37 (78.7)	6 (12.8)	4 (8.5)	47 (15.5)
Year Three	40 (74)	6 (11.1)	8 (14.8)	54 (17.8)
Year Four	45 (70.3)	9 (14)	10 (15.6)	64 (21)
Year Five	63 (75)	11 (13)	10 (11.9)	84 (27.6)
Total f(%)	224 (73.7)	34 (11.2)	46 (15.1)	304 (100)

The obtained data on the students' opinions on knowing the Romani language as a welcome help in working with the Roma children portray a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in their responses according to their study group ($\chi^2 = 4.822$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.023$). A significance level of 5% was found showing that a significantly greater number of primary education students (Table 16) believe that the knowledge of the Romani language would be a welcome aid in their work with the Roma pupils. Most participants' answers were positive (77.3%), while only about one fifth of them provided a negative response (7.2%), or were indecisive on the matter (15.5%).

Table 16

Differences in the participants' responses regarding the knowledge of the Romani language as a welcome help in the communication with the members of the Roma national minority with respect to the participants' study group

Study group	Do you think that the knowledge of the Romani language would be useful to future primary and preschool teachers should they accept teaching positions in schools attended by Roma national minority pupils?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Primary education studies	200 (76.9)	16 (6.1)	44 (16.9)	260 (85.5)
Preschool education studies	35 (79.5)	6 (13.6)	3 (6.8)	44 (14.5)
Total f(%)	235 (77.3)	22 (7.2)	47 (15.5)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) in the students' answers when they were compared according to their study locations ($\chi^2 = 4.973$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.083$) (Table 17).

Table 17

Differences in the participants' responses regarding the knowledge of the Romani language as a welcome help in the communication with the members of the Roma national minority with respect to the participants' study location

Study location	Do you think that the knowledge of the Romani language would be useful to future primary and preschool teachers should they accept teaching positions in schools attended by Roma national minority pupils?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Čakovec	94 (77.7)	4 (3.3)	23 (19)	121 (39.8)
Zagreb	103 (75.7)	14 (10.3)	19 (14)	136 (44.7)
Petrinja	38 (80.8)	4 (8.5)	5 (10.6)	47 (15.4)
Total f(%)	235 (77.3)	22 (7.2)	47 (15.5)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) in the students' answers when they were compared according to their year of study ($\chi^2 = 3.801$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.434$) (Table 18).

Less than half of the participants (46.1%) responded positively when asked if they would accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue. About one tenth of the participants responded negatively (10.9%) and almost one half of the participants were indecisive (43.15%). No statistically significant difference was found between the participants ($p > 0.05$) when compared according to their study groups ($\chi^2 = 5.175$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.265$) (Table 19).

Table 18

Differences in the participants' responses regarding the knowledge of the Romani language as a welcome help in the communication with the members of the Roma national minority with respect to the participants' study years

Year of study	Do you think that the knowledge of the Romani language would be useful to future primary and preschool teachers should they accept teaching positions in schools attended by Roma national minority pupils?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Year One	35 (63.6)	8 (14.5)	12 (21.8)	55 (18)
Year Two	37 (78.7)	5 (10.6)	5 (10.6)	47 (15.5)
Year Three	43 (79.6)	2 (3.7)	9 (16.7)	54 (17.8)
Year Four	54 (84.3)	0	10 (15.6)	64 (21)
Year Five	66 (78.6)	7 (8.3)	11 (13)	84 (27.6)
Total f(%)	235 (77.3)	22 (7.2)	47 (15.5)	304 (100)

Table 19

Differences in the participants' willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue with respect to the participants' study groups

Study group	Would you accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Primary education studies	121 (46.5)	25 (9.6)	114 (43.8)	260 (85.5)
Preschool education studies	19 (43.1)	8 (18.1)	17 (38.6)	44 (14.5)
Total f(%)	140 (46.1)	33 (10.9)	131 (43.1)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) in the students' answers when they were compared according to their study locations ($\chi^2 = 1.720$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.423$) (Table 20).

Table 20

Differences in the participants' willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue with respect to the participants' study locations

Study location	Would you accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Čakovec	53 (43.8)	15 (12.4)	53 (43.8)	121 (39.8)
Zagreb	64 (47)	11 (8)	61 (44.8)	136 (44.7)
Petrinja	23 (48.9)	7 (14.9)	17 (36.1)	47 (15.4)
Total f(%)	140 (46.1)	33 (10.9)	131 (43.1)	304 (100)

No statistically significant difference was found ($p > 0.05$) in the students' answers when they were compared according to their year of study ($\chi^2 = 0.279$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.991$) (Table 21).

Table 21

Differences in the participants' willingness to accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue with respect to the participants' study year

Year of study	Would you accept a teaching position at a school where most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue?			Total f(%)
	Yes f(%)	No f(%)	I do not know f(%)	
Year One	23 (41.8)	7 (12.7)	25 (45.4)	55 (18)
Year Two	20 (42.5)	6 (12.8)	21 (44.7)	47 (15.5)
Year Three	25 (46.3)	7 (13)	22 (40.7)	54 (17.8)
Year Four	35 (54.7)	3 (21)	26 (40.6)	64 (21)
Year Five	37 (44)	10 (11.9)	37 (44)	84 (27.6)
Total f(%)	140 (46.1)	33 (10.9)	131 (43.1)	304 (100)

Discussion

The first research problem was aimed at investigating if primary and preschool education students encountered Roma children in the course of their teaching practice in schools or kindergartens. It was shown that only one third of the participants had encountered children who were members of the Roma national minority in Croatia during their teaching practice. This ratio is not high enough if we consider the (great) likelihood of the participants getting employed at schools attended by Roma pupils. Primary education students reported having encountered Roma pupils more than the preschool education students. A possible explanation for this result is the fact that kindergarten does not form part of obligatory education in Croatia and thus does not encompass the entire future school population. It seems that the preschool preparatory programme obligatorily attended by all the children who have not attended kindergarten has not been sufficiently covered by the students' teaching practice. One may express a justified doubt in these students' competence to work in practice, regardless of whether they are being educated in the places where the Roma minority is substantially represented, i.e. at the Faculty of Teacher Education local branch in Čakovec which belongs to Međimurje County, or not. Nevertheless, it was encouraging to learn that the fourth and fifth year students who have encountered the Roma national minority pupils in the course of their teaching practice reported to have regularly frequented such schools.

The second research problem was aimed at investigating the willingness of the students to learn the Romani language. The results show that a little less than one half of the students responded negatively, while no difference was found in their responses with respect to their study group, location and year of study. Indecisive and negative answers portray the necessity of educating students in the attempt to change their attitudes. If we add the negative and indecisive responses, we may point to a positive and/or negative trend in their willingness to learn the Romani languages and argue in favour of the need to develop the students' awareness of interculturality, no matter what their study group, year and location are.

The third research problem was aimed at finding out if the students were willing to accept a teaching position at a school in which most pupils speak the Romani language. The results show that only one third of the participants would accept such a position, one fifth of them would not, and less than a half of the participants were indecisive on the matter. This points to the similar conclusions as in the previous research problem, so that the number of the positive, negative and indecisive answers to these two questions is comparable. We are encouraged by the fact that the negative responses are less frequent than the positive or indecisive ones. As in the responses to the previous question, no significant difference was found in the participants' answers to this question in terms of their study group, year and location. Here too, one could point out the fact that in their two final study years the students' lack of willingness to accept teaching positions in the described schools remains unchanged. However, one would need to further investigate the attitudes of the undecided students in order to reach more precise conclusions on the issue.

The results collected to answer the fourth research problem highlight the students' awareness of the unequal knowledge of the Croatian language in the Roma and Croatian children who participate in the same educational process. No statistically significant differences were found in any of the parameters according to which the participants' answers were compared. Such results present a good starting point in designing a strategy to educate students on this issue.

The fifth research problem aimed at investigating the students' knowledge of the conditions in which Roma children get their education. The students expressed their awareness of the fact that the curriculum should be adapted to the Roma children by introducing changes into the guidelines for teaching Croatian. Upon their enrolment into primary education Roma children do not have sufficient knowledge of the Croatian language to follow the current programme, so the adapted curriculum should be designed with respect to their needs. Most students are aware of the fact that their teaching would be facilitated by a different curriculum which would be adapted to the children who learn Croatian as a second or foreign language. Despite the fact that they have not had frequent encounters with Roma pupils, the students show awareness of the abovementioned problem. Two thirds of the participants believe that a different curriculum is needed which would encompass solutions to the stated problems. Thus it is evident that students do understand the problems teachers face in their work with Roma pupils and believe that relevant documents should be changed to accommodate their needs. The described situation is certainly one of the possible causes of their expressed lack of interest and feeling that they are not competent enough to work in such schools. This may be the reason for their unwillingness to accept a teaching position in a school attended by Roma children. This result, coupled with the previously discussed participants' responses, may be interpreted in terms of their feeling of professional incompetence. Further studies should look into this issue to specify the exact type of incompetence we may be dealing with here. Alternatively,

this could also be the reason for the students' unwillingness to work in such schools, as is portrayed by the previously analyzed responses.

The aim of the sixth research problem was to investigate the students' awareness of the fact that the knowledge of one's mother tongue helps them to connect with those pupils. The results show that the primary education students were more aware of this fact than their preschool education colleagues. Bearing in mind the importance of children's linguistic and intellectual development at such early age, one should consider ways to develop sensibility for and competences in Croatian as a second or foreign language in preschool education students. It is interesting to compare the results of the previously analyzed questions to the one dealt with as part of the sixth research problem; although the students are aware of the importance of knowing the pupils' mother tongue, they are mostly not willing to learn the Roma pupils' language.

The seventh research problem dealt with the willingness to accept a teaching position in a school in which most pupils do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue. Less than half of the students answered that they would be willing to accept such a position, only one tenth of them would not be willing to do so, and almost half of the participants were indecisive. This research problem was not aimed at investigating the participants' opinions on the schools attended by the Roma minority children. It was a general question aimed at teaching children who use Croatian as a second or foreign language. The results uncover the students' tendency to avoid such schools altogether, which may be ascribed to their feeling of insufficient competence to work with such pupils.

Conclusions

Statistically significant differences were found in the responses to three out of the eleven questions provided in the questionnaire. Responses to two of these questions differed with respect to the participants' study groups – primary and preschool teacher education. The primary and preschool education students' responses differed with respect to their encounters with the Roma national minority pupils in the course of their teaching practice and their awareness of the fact that the knowledge of the Romani language may help them in their work with the speakers whose mother tongue is Romani. A statistically significant difference was found with respect to the participants' study years in enquiring about their encounter with the pupils belonging to the Roma national minority. Senior students (fourth and fifth year of studies) reported that they had encountered Roma pupils more frequently than their younger colleagues (first, second and third year students). No statistically significant difference was found in the participants' responses with respect to their study location.

These results point to the conclusion that the participants are in theory familiar with the issue of the education of the pupils belonging to the Roma national minority and the problems they face due to their lack of knowledge of the Croatian language. However, the students are not prepared to face this problem in practice. They are

often indecisive in their answers to the questions related to their potential work in schools attended by Roma children, which may be interpreted as resulting from their insecurity caused by the lack of necessary competences.

The obtained results fit into the context of the existing situation in the primary education as well as the research carried out with the teachers who already work with second or foreign language pupils (Cvikić & Novak Milić, 2015 ; Češi, Cvikić, & Milović, 2012). This study adds to the body of knowledge on this topic portraying the need for an improvement of the quality of the education system with respect to:

- the familiarization with the Roma culture and Boyash Romani minority language
- the consideration of Croatian as a second or foreign language.

These results can also be presented in a more general context. It is necessary to investigate the level of the Croatian language knowledge in majority and minority children of different age groups. It is necessary to prepare systematically designed programmes for the education of primary and preschool teachers trained in teaching Croatian as a second or foreign language. We need to design courses which would be offered in the initial teacher education studies and which would encourage application of current research-based knowledge in the education in kindergartens and schools. Such courses would also be aimed at developing students' competences in the field of early language acquisition of Croatian as a second or foreign language. This would most certainly result in the development of positive attitudes to intercultural and multilingual communication.

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Hrvatski kao nematerinski jezik – recepcija studenata Učiteljskog fakulteta

Sažetak

U Međimurskoj županiji živi oko 11 000 pripadnika romske nacionalne manjine, a oko 1 400 učenika Roma nalazi se u sustavu osnovnoškolskog obrazovanja, što čini 13% školske populacije Međimurja (<http://www.medjimurska-zupanija.hr/najnovije/u-predskolu-krenula-nova-generacija-ucenika-roma>). Učenicima romske nacionalne manjine hrvatski nije materinski jezik.

Lingvistička i obrazovna istraživanja pokazuju da prilikom dolaska u školu romski učenici ne znaju ili nedovoljno znaju jezik, što im otežava praćenje cjelokupne nastave (Cvikić, 2007, Cvikić i Petroska, 2013, Turza-Bogdan i Ciglar, 2010). Način obrazovanja tih učenika u mlađoj školskoj dobi ovisi o učiteljskim kompetencijama, posebice jezičnoj i metodičkoj. Zanimalo nas je mišljenje studenata Učiteljskog fakulteta o problematici obrazovanja romskih učenika na hrvatskom kao nematerinskom jeziku. Proveden je anketni upitnik među studentima učiteljskog i odgojiteljskog studija. Odabrani studentski uzorak pokazuje mišljenje i recepciju, ali ukazuje i na mogućnosti povećanja jezičnih i metodičkih kompetencija budućih učitelja.

Na temelju dobivenih rezultata predlažu se mogućnosti poboljšanja kvalitete obrazovanja učitelja i odgojitelja u odnosu na važan segment usvajanja hrvatskoga kao inoga jezika.

Ključne riječi: *hrvatski kao nematerinski jezik; romska nacionalna manjina.*