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DIFFERENCES IN THE APPLICATION OF STRATEGIC SUPPORT IN INDIVIDUALIZED TEACHING WITH PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

***Abstract:** Bearing in mind that the 21st century teaching teachers need to be skilled in using different educational strategies, both for typical development students and for students with learning difficulties, the aim of this study is to identify the differences in the assessments of teachers in regular primary schools on what strategies, i.e. didactic-methodical support are selected and applied for successful individualized teaching of students in regular schools, in the methods, tools, forms, or procedures which are most used. The research is represented with both teachers in class teaching and teachers in subject teaching of primary schools (N=410) from the wider part of the Republic of Croatia. The hypothesis is that there are statistically significant differences between the teachers in class teaching and the teachers in subject teaching in implementing support strategies for successful individualized teaching. The results show that teachers from class teaching more than the subject teachers exchange and individualize different teaching methods, procedures and forms. They use more modern forms of teaching such as digital educational learning materials. The results are intended to indicate the degree of individualized educational practice, with a particular focus on the dilemmas and challenges arising from the results of the research. These dilemmas and challenges, on the one hand, are focused on the competences of teachers without which good teaching is impossible, and on the other hand, the process itself, the changing of teaching, in order to approach the required standards of pedagogical practice of the 21st century based on the performance indicators.*

***Key words:** didactic-methodical approach, individualized education, teaching strategies*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary school of the 21st century strives towards excellence and constantly tries to improve the quality of the education process. This includes the quality of teaching of the teachers who realize an incentive atmosphere, recognize indivi-

dual needs and interests of the students adapt their teaching to the individual needs and interests of the students, who can, want and do everything in order to realize the students' achievements. According to *The Strategy of Expert Training for the Professional Development of Educators (2014-2020)* the contemporary teacher is perceived within the context of the expert who has a developed professional identity and regularly betters himself through professional training. The *Strategy* stresses that quality teaching is that which is clear, logical and useful and which should take place in an incentive environment that has respect for the various needs of the students and which realizes specific established goals and positive results of teaching (*The Strategy of Expert Training for the Professional Development of Educators (2014-2020)*: 21).

In today's classrooms the differences among the students are mostly reflected in their abilities and possibilities which represent a challenge for the teachers who need to individualize their teaching by removing obstacles in participation, studying and the achievements of the students. Through such individualized methods of teaching the teachers promote equality among the students and become inclusive teachers. It is precisely educational inclusion which implies that the social expectations and social aspects of the learning environment are perceived in such a way that each student has equal possibilities to participate and realize his/her potential. Therefore, inclusive education is much more than just placement of the child with difficulties into the regular system. This, more than anything means the realization of such an environment in which each student, including students with difficulties get the chance to develop all their potentials (*The Framework for Encouraging and Adapting the Experiences of Teaching and Evaluating the Achievements of the Children and Students with Difficulties, National Document, 2016*). Within the context of educational inclusion through active participation of the student in all class activities, the span of his/her educational achievement is recognized and the teachers individualize the class by creating new methods of teaching for effective studying (Whitty, 2002; Barton, 2003; Florian, 2005; Hofman & Kilimo, 2014).

In order for the teachers to be competent for such structuring of the education process, according to the document entitled „*Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for lifelong learning, 2006/962/EC*“ it is key to develop the eight basic competences during the lifelong education of the teacher. They are (1) communication in the mother tongue, (2) communication in foreign language, (3) mathematical competence and the main competences in science and technology, (4) digital competence, (5) learning how to study, (6) social and civil competence, (7) initiative and enterprise (8) cultural awareness and expression.

Vizek Vidović (2009) states that the teachers in regular classes need to have specific competences. They are, namely especially significant in the planning and implementation of individualized approaches in working with students with difficulties. Along with the other competences of the teacher, the author states competences such as dedication to encouraging results and improvement of the student, the

development and incentive strategy of teaching, consultation with the student and the parents, the ability to create a stimulating learning climate, the application of what was learned, the assessment of the teaching results and the student's achievements, collaborative solutions to problems, reaction to various needs of students, the improvement of the teaching and learning environment and the ability to adapt the curriculum to the specific educational context.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) explain that the level of support of individualized methods of teaching and individualized teaching material for students with difficulties is closely connected to the attitudes of the teachers which they have towards inclusion of the students with difficulties into the regular education system. In accordance with this, the teachers need to be reflexive practitioners who can recognize that the flexibility and a certain teaching method or activity can stimulate the creativity of their students, create a better contribution to personalized learning and obtaining new skills (*The Strategy of Expert Training for the Professional Development of Educators (2014-2020)*). Carr (2005) stresses the significance of cooperative learning strategies to enforce the bond, sense of belonging and solidarity among students. Namely, through collaborative learning the students connect the content with experience. Therefore, it is precisely that type of teaching which is based on the individualized approach aimed at the fact that every student can succeed. Unlike traditional class, contemporary class tries to create conditions with the aim preparing the student for active and independent participation in society.

In accordance to the above mentioned the wider application of new education technologies in the education system is being considered, such as online learning and digital education content as a part of the educational politics in the Republic of Croatia and which is stated in *The Strategy of Education, Science and Technology* (Croatian parliament, 2014). As one of the five goals of the *Strategy*, is the advancement of the application of information and communication technology in the class process and the need to educate the teachers in order to use this more in their teaching. According to the document *The Framework for Digital Competence of Users in School: teachers and expert assistants, principles and administrative workers* (2016), a digitally competent teacher is one who is aware of the need of integration of digital technology in the education process as well as the ability of actively using digital technology in his/her education process.

However, the term „education technology“ in education should be considered within the wider context with a different meaning. From perceiving it within the context of technology with the devices used in the class process to perceiving the term as information which is transferred to the students through various methods as a means for realizing the goals and the tasks. Some authors describe „education technology“ as a concept within the frame of tools, such as different media along with network hardware (computer programs, internet and such) and consider the main theoretical perspectives for their effective application (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Richey, 2008). Biondić (1993) which explains the term „education technology“ within the frame of the entire system of methods, procedures, tools, aides and devices. By means of such

terminological specification education technology is placed into the wider didactic and methodological environment within which it is suggested that didactic means together with the class methods ensure the maximization of educational efficiency.

In that sense the significance of the education technology receives a wider context in the education process which refers to the various approaches in the realization of class goals and in the context of the contemporary school of the 21st century can be perceived as a step away from the traditional models of teaching in which the emphasis lies on audiovisual methods and a step towards the contemporary approach to learning and teaching. Devi (2001) considered the possible relations of technology and education within the frame of general discussion on the role of technology in society. The Author's main argument was that many fields of contemporary society have been transformed by technology and that it was inevitable for education to experience the same transformation.

Kadum Bošnjak (2012) states the significance of implementation of new teaching strategies in class, that is, didactic and methodological support which puts into practice interactive and collaborative learning through evocation, understanding the meaning and reflection, the application of strategies of active learning. This creates an efficient education process where the student learns based on his/her personal experience, understands what he/she has learned and using his/her own words applies what he/she has learned in new situations (Kadum Bošnjak, 2012: 184) which in the end contributes to a more efficient learning and skills of the student in different education fields and encourages the development of critical, creative and logical thinking and deduction. The author also states that the diversity of didactic and methodological forms of teaching increases motivation and diligence of the student in his/her work and learning process and stimulates social interaction among the students during the learning process.

Therefore the term „teaching strategies“ should be observed from a wider perspective, that is within the context of support strategies which in teaching refer to didactic and methodological support, that is the adaptation and individualization of procedures, forms, methods and tools in class (Ivančić & Stančić, 2002; Ivančić & Stančić, 2006; Stančić, Kiš-Glavaš & Urbanc, 2014; Igrić and associates, 2015). Bognar (2002) states that the class strategies are divided into a larger number of methods and the methods are further divided into a larger number of procedures. Buljubašić Kuzmanović and Petrović (2014) carried out a research to find out which teaching strategies teachers from first to fourth grade of primary school (class teachers) and first to fourth grade high school used. The results showed that the teachers and professors mostly preferred frontal teaching and preferred the use of computers in class the least. Furthermore, the results indicate the presence of the application of various teaching strategies and methods with class teachers, however their application decreases proportionally with teaching in higher classes, namely subject classes. The results also showed that problematic and programmed teaching, project and computer class are applied the least.

Forlin (2001) claims that teaching students with difficulties in regular schools requires a great change in the role and responsibility of the teacher as well as a need

for a higher level of individualized support. Timperley and Robinson (2001) also state that the teachers must adapt or change the teaching strategies by using different class means and aides. Therefore, the teachers should transform their work for their own personal lifelong development to use the current strategies they are using in class and which are based on more traditional, audiovisual methods such as: CD players, TVs, slides, audio recordings and supplement them with new methods and technological tools in class.

In accordance with the before stated the **aim** of this research is to determine the differences among the teachers in regular elementary schools by seeing which strategies, that is, didactic and methodological support they choose and apply to realize successful individualized teaching, regarding the methods, tools, forms, that is, the procedures that they use the most.

In accordance with the before stated, there is a set **hypothesis** that there is a statistically significant difference between class teachers from grades one to four and subject teachers from grades five to eight regarding the support strategies being applied for successful individualized teaching.

METHODOLOGICAL RESEARCH

PARTICIPANTS

The respondent sample is comprised of a total of 410 teachers from grades one to eight, that is 237 teachers from grades one to four (further referred to as class teachers) and 173 teachers from grades five to eight (further referred to as subject teachers), from regular primary schools in the area of 6 counties in the Republic of Croatia (The City of Zagreb, Zagreb county, Sisak and Moslavina county, Lika and Senj county, Osijek and Baranja county and Vukovar and Srijem county). Regardless of the fact that the respondent sample was not equalized territorially, the research included teachers from regular primary schools from a wider geographical area of the Republic of Croatia considering that our entire primary school system in the Republic of Croatia is based by a legal regulation on the competences of the teacher for providing individualized support to students in class (The Act on Education in Elementary, and High School in the Republic of Croatia National Gazette, 87/08, 86/09, 92/10, 105/10, 90/11, 5/12, 16/12, 86/12, 126/12, 94/13, 152/14 and 7/17). In accordance to that the teachers in their preparations and yearly plans for individualized support and approach of learning and teaching and evaluation (rhythm of studying, environment, materials, means and aides) which they will apply on a specific student in a specific class subject. According to article 65 of the Act this refers to students with difficulties in development, learning, problems in behavior and emotional problems and students with disadvantages caused by education, social, economic, cultural and language factors.

Most of the subjects were between the ages of 31-50 and most of them had 11-30 years of working experience. According to whether the teachers worked only in class, subject or both class and subject teaching, Table 1 represents the detailed

structure of the teachers from the sample considering their age, work experience and professional qualification.

Table 1. Structure of the sample by gender, class/subject teaching, age, years of services at the current job position and professional qualification (N=410, %)

Participants	%	Class/ Subject teaching	%	Age	%	Years at the current job position	%	Professional qualification	%
Male	10.8	Class teaching	57.8	up to 30 years	14.9	up to 5 years	20.0	University degree	74.3
Female	89.2	Subject teaching	42.2	31-40 years	29.3	5-10 years	15.9	College education	25.7
		Total	100						
		Only in class teaching	57.1	41-50 years	32.0	11-20 years	27.6		
		Only in subject teaching	32.8	51-60 years	18.8	21-30 years	23.4		
		In class and subject teaching	10.0	over 60 years	5.0	over 30 years	13.1		
Total	100		100		100		100		100

MEASURING DEVICE

The research was conducted during the school year of 2016/2017. A modified questionnaire for teachers on the provision of support to students in class was used for the need of this research (Dover, 1994). The first part of the questionnaire refers to the social and demographic characteristics of the subjects. The second part of the questionnaire contains 42 questions which the teachers answered on a four level Likert type scale (daily-1, weekly-2, monthly-3, rarely-4), to see how often they applied certain strategies in teaching students with difficulties and students without any difficulties, that is, which didactic and methodological support did they use most often (considering the methods, means, forms or procedures). Assessment 1 meant the most often and most commonly used support. Assessment 4 meant the least and most rarely represented didactic and methodological support.

Because *The Rulebook on Elementary School and High School Education of Students with Difficulties in Development* (National Gazette no. 24/2015) stresses that during the education period students with difficulties have the right to adequate forms of help which are realized through professional support and pedagogic and didactic adaptation (art.2) from a total of 42 questions in the questionnaire 19

questions of which each offered two replacements (the assessment for students with difficulties and students without any difficulties) and each of the subjects assessed separately the frequency of support which he/she applies at the stated category of student, that is students with difficulties and students of typical development, that is, students without any difficulties.

METHODS OF COLLECTING AND PROCESSING DATA

The teachers filled out the questionnaires individually and anonymously along with instructions that by filling them out they would contribute to the directions of research of today’s inclusive practice therefore they needed to be open and honest when answering the questions. The data collected through this questionnaire was analyzed on a descriptive and latent level. The obtained results were used to calculate the main descriptive parameters: minimal and maximum results (*min. and max.*), *mean, standard deviation, variance, skewness and kurtosis*. Within the inferential statistics and for the needs of this paper, 10 variables were singled out and analyzed. The basic descriptive values of the scale are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive values (N=410)

Variables	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Std. Error	Stat.	Stat.	Stat.	Std. Error	Stat.	Std. Error
V17	3	1	4	1.64	.039	.778	.606	1.084	.122	.598	.243
V18	3	1	4	1.92	.045	.919	.844	.710	.121	-.392	.241
V23	3	1	4	1.99	.046	.912	.832	.786	.123	-.072	.245
V24	3	1	4	2.24	.049	.973	.946	.442	.122	-.750	.244
V25	3	1	4	2.18	.049	.979	.958	.462	.122	-.766	.244
V26	3	1	4	2.28	.049	.973	.947	.328	.122	-.858	.244
V39	3	1	4	2.19	.051	1.018	1.036	.288	.123	-1.096	.245
V40	3	1	4	3.12	.052	1.037	1.075	-.855	.123	-.549	.245
V41	3	1	4	2.19	.052	1.039	1.080	.401	.122	-1.022	.244
V42	3	1	4	2.44	.052	1.048	1.099	.048	.122	-1.190	.243

The variables refer to how often the teachers consider/use: *aides in class (concretes, images and graphic images, individualized maps, tools...)* - for students with difficulties (V17) and students with typical development (V18); *audiovisual means (audio records, TVs, movies, slides...)* - for students with difficulties (V23) and students with typical development (V24); *digital education content (by which the student learns and follows the class contents more easily)* - for students with difficulties (V25) and students with typical development (V26); *alternative written exams (different, various tests, through the media)* - for students with difficulties (V39) and students with typical development (V40) and *teaching based on collaborative learning of students in class*

(flexible learning, creating a personal learning environment) - for students with difficulties (V41) and students with typical development (V42).

In order to test the differences between the class and subject teachers the non parameter Mann-Whitney U test was used, considering the testing of the significance between two independent samples. The data obtained was processed by a statistical package SPSS-23.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained by the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 3) show that on individual values, there is a difference between the class and subject teachers in the application of certain strategies, that is didactic and methodological support for successful individualized teaching, that is, out of ten, there is a significant statistical difference on eight variables and on two variables there is no statistically significant difference between the class and subject teachers which partially confirms the hypothesis.

The differences between the class and subject teachers are reflected in the variables which refer to the use of aides in class and audiovisual means, digital education content for both students with difficulties and students without any difficulties and the implementation of collaborative forms of work in class. The results however do not show the difference between the class and subject teachers in the implementation of alternative written exams, for example, adapted exams, individualized work sheets, through various media for both students with difficulties and students without any difficulties.

Table 3. Differences on the variables between the class and subject teachers - Mann-Whitney Test

	Aides in class V17 – SD*	Aides in class V18 – ST**	Audiovisual means V23 – SD*	Audiovisual means V24 – ST**		
Mann-Whitney U	13859.000	15464.000	16679.000	16777.000		
Wilcoxon W	40424.000	43430.000	42785.000	43342.000		
Z	-5.690	-4.365	-2.260	-2.270		
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.024	.023		
	Digital education content V25 – SD*	Digital education content V26 – ST**	Alternative written exams V39 – SD*	Alternative written exams V40 – ST**	Collaborative forms of work in class V41 – SD*	Collaborative forms of work in class V42 – ST**
Mann-Whitney U	16773.500	16584.000	18347.000	18335.500	14275.500	15328.000
Wilcoxon W	43569.500	43612.000	44912.000	44900.500	40840.500	42589.000
Z	-2.332	-2.571	-.689	-.507	-4.636	-3.927
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.010	.491	.612	.000	.000

*SD - students with difficulties; **ST - students with typical development

Because the Mann-Whitney non parameter test for testing the hypothesis, that is establishing the differences between class and subject teachers was used, the direction of the

differences of those variables on which statistically significant differences were found is shown in Table 4. According to the direction of the scale, the lower value of the mean implies greater representation in the application of certain strategies of support of the teacher in teaching students with difficulties and students without any difficulties, while the higher value of the mean refers to lesser application of certain strategies of support.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney Test - direction of differences

Variables	Teachers	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
V17 Aides in class (concretes, images and graphic images, individualized maps, tools...) for students with difficulties	class teachers	175.76	40424.00
	subject teachers	235.92	40579.00
V18 Aides in class (concretes, images and graphic images, individualized maps, tools...) for students with typical development	class teachers	184.03	43430.00
	subject teachers	232.59	40006.00
V23 Audiovisual means (audio records, TVs, movies, slides...) for students with difficulties	class teachers	187.65	42785.00
	subject teachers	212.13	35425.00
V24 Audiovisual means (audio records, TVs, movies, slides...) for students with typical development	class teachers	188.44	43342.00
	subject teachers	213.54	35661.00
V25 Digital education content (by which the student learns and follows the class contents more easily) for students with difficulties	class teachers	188.61	43569.50
	subject teachers	214.56	35831.50
V26 Digital education content (by which the student learns and follows the class contents more easily) for students with typical development	class teachers	187.98	43612.00
	subject teachers	216.69	36188.00
V41 Teaching based on collaborative learning of students in class (flexible learning, creating a personal learning environment) for students with difficulties	class teachers	177.57	40840.50
	subject teachers	229.53	38560.50
V42 Teaching based on collaborative learning of students in class (flexible learning, creating a personal learning environment) for students with typical development	class teachers	182.79	42589.00
	subject teachers	227.30	38414.00

The direction of differences indicates that the class teachers use more aids in class, audiovisual devices, and digital education contents and also based their teaching on collaborative learning more than subject teachers.

The results show that class teachers use aids in class (concretes, individualized work sheets, graphical images, maps...) more with students with difficulties and organize their class by means of collaborative learning that is, flexible learning and creation of a personal learning environment. They use audiovisual devices less and regarding digital education contents, they use them the least in working with students with difficulties. The results furthermore show that class teachers rarely base their teaching on collaborative learning and with students with typical development they use aides the least as well as digital education contents and audiovisual means.

The direction of differences for subject teachers indicates that they use audiovisual devices (audio recordings, TV-movies...) in working with students with difficulties they use digital education contents less and they use collaborative learning and sides in class the least. For students without any difficulties they use audiovisual means more than educational digital contents and they realize class less in the form of collaborative learning. The use aids in class the least for both students with and without difficulties.

The results indicate that the application of contemporary methods, such as e-textbooks as platforms, interactive boards, the use of free and quality tools, such as Pearltrees, the use of web 2.0 tools for generating work sheets with exercises for practice in the form of crosswords, puzzles, mazes, jigsaw puzzles and such... is not represented enough in neither class nor subject classes regardless of the fact that in the past few years in the Republic of Croatia teachers have been offered the possibility of using and being introduced to available digital education through, for example webinars and online manuals. Namely, in working with students with difficulties the class teachers are mostly focused on aides who they can often make themselves, such as various concretes, image and graphic slides, contents adapted on individualized work sheets according to the education needs of the students with difficulties. These results also show individualized teaching and contemporary methods of teaching, especially for students with difficulties are not represented enough with subject teachers. However, the results also indicate that the teachers do not use collaborative forms of learning as well which points to the fact that teachers do not plan or organize their class enough in a way that the collaborative methods of work develop peer support in class.

Regarding that, the results indicate that the contemporary approach in teaching should be more represented and possibly altered and supplemented according to the needs of each student. In the education process namely, apart from the content the personal development of the student is included. The inclusive teachers understand the differences of students and do not use the characteristics of their students in order to categorize or label them for the purpose of a different treatment (Igrić and associates 2015). According to that teachers should know along with the possibilities the various learning styles in order to help the students to develop their metacognitive awareness which enables access to their own learning and helps them to develop their self-confidence, self-respect, motivation and willpower. Working in groups and collaborative learning in more and more heterogeneous classes show an advantage

on both the academic and social plan. Combining work in small groups with peer support is useful for both students with and those without difficulties. This means that if some teaching strategy is good for students with difficulties it can also be good for those who acquire knowledge easily. It has been shown that interaction and relationships among students with difficulties can be beneficial for those students who acquire knowledge easily in improving their self image as well as the increase of social cognition (*Didactic and methodological instructions for natural subjects and mathematics for students with difficulties*).

These results indicate the need for greater positive changes within the frame of inclusive principles and norms of individualization by implementing and alternating traditional and contemporary methods, procedures and forms so that the typical students and students with difficulties in regular schools would be ensured better learning outcomes. Teachers who individualize the methods, procedures, forms and means during the education demands process are better teachers than those who teach all the students in the same way. Besides this, if more changes and alterations are made for all students in a classroom, the number of recommendations for special education of students with difficulties can be decreased and that way the risk for their failure is reduced which will make the school a more successful place for all children (Stevens & Everington, 2001).

The results show that class teachers more than subject teachers use, alternate and individualize various class methods, procedures and forms in working with students. The students should be offered in accordance with their individual abilities and possibilities in subject teaching classes as well alternative methods with visual images and maps which can show various causal links which are significant for acquiring individual contents. In that sense it's for example necessary to give to students with difficulties in learning a simplified diagram as an individualized template which will enable that student to follow the images depicted by a digital video content. However, the teachers in general use more traditional and less contemporary methods such as digital education contents which are available online as free learning and teaching material to teachers and students (for example electronic books, that is e-textbooks, independent education modules in digital format, education applications etc.). Further interpretation of these results indicates that the teachers do not meet the contemporary needs of the teaching process which is a requirement of today's inclusive classrooms. The main characteristic of the inclusive classroom (in which the students have different spans of abilities and possibilities) does not only lie in the specific alterations of the role of the teacher but also in the alteration of the learning and the role of the student, from the student who mainly uses reproductive thinking to the student who uses independent thoughts. Therefore, when making class plans the teachers needs to pay attention to the individual needs of each student and predict the teaching on more different levels and methods. This can be achieved by using and creating various individualized didactic materials and forms of demonstrations by using digital education content and working in small groups, using the collaboration of the students and peer support.

The new teaching trends of the teachers of the 21st century refer to the encouragement and insurance of the right environment and didactic and methodological support which will encourage the self-activity of the student, cooperation and learning with the support of digital technology. This means that the teacher in his/her teaching method should be more of an organizer and guide, give initial instructions to the students through various means and tools and through individualized methods and procedures direct and encourage the activity of each student according to their interests and method of work. Kralj (2008, according to Seufert & Euler, 2005) describes the application of information and communication technology and states that the individualization is conducted through non linear organization of contents which should be formed in order to encourage and enable independent selection of contents in accordance with the student's abilities which will facilitate the learning process for both the students with difficulties and average and gifted students as well. The author further states that the role therefore of media didactics is to show how to apply the media (and technology) in order to improve the teaching and learning process as well as to develop the learning and teaching strategies which will use the media in an efficient manner.

CONCLUSION

The research is based on the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant difference between teachers from grades one to, namely class teachers and teachers from grades five to eight, namely subject teachers in support strategies which they apply for successful individualized teaching. The results show that the hypothesis has been partially accepted considering that the differences between the class and subject teachers have been found on all variables except on those variables which indicate the implementation of different, alternative written exams for students with difficulties as well as for students with typical development which indicates the need for a greater increase of professional capacity of subject teachers for individualized teaching. This chiefly means the need for wider application of contemporary education technology in class, introducing and alternating various strategies in teaching which can like collaborative forms of learning encourage the self-activity of the students.

In accordance with the stated, the results indicate that the application of contemporary methods of teaching for students with difficulties like for example digital education content is declining with the teaching in higher grades. The class teachers use digital content more than subject teachers with students with difficulties. Therefore it comes as no surprise that the criticism for working with students with difficulties is often directed more at subject teachers who reflect their helplessness and incompetence which refers to the insecurity of selecting the right education procedures which as a result creates a burden in working with the students and causes many problems in classrooms (Kudek Mirošević, 2012). In that sense the direction should be drawn towards the main aspects which should be taken into consideration with individualized teaching and which refer to the professional skills and abilities,

professional knowledge and understanding of the individual abilities of the student as well as the personal dedication of the teacher. In order for individualized teaching to be successful enough time is required to prepare and plan the class along with traditionally represented and contemporary methods of teaching in order for the teacher as a reflecting practitioner to improve and advance his/her skills and knowledge (Pijl and assoc., 1997; Mittler, 2000; Batarelo Kokić, 2004; Jurčević Lozančić & Kudek Mirošević, 2015). According to that is important to what measure the teachers alternate traditional and contemporary support strategies which in teaching refer to didactic and methodological support that is the adaptation of procedures, forms, methods and means in class. Namely, the application of education technology does not necessarily mean the application of the individualized approach in class. In order for the application of education technology to be individualized the teachers must apply the content and information which they can find in various repositories that is organized collections of digital education material which enables them the organization, categorization and distribution of all data and content for referencing, monitoring or usage in class, and which they can transfer to the students through different ways as a means for the realization of goals and tasks suitable to the education needs of individual students.

Regarding that, it is not surprising that precisely by giving significance to mastering the skills of teaching directed at the encouragement of active and deeper approach to learning, the specific skills of teachers are stated such as the creation of a stimulating learning environment, the stimulation of motivation for learning, the use of information technology, the readiness for self-assessment and professional development (Vizek Vidović, 2005). The stated results in the fact that there is not enough conducted research in the Republic of Croatia on the acquired competences of the teacher and the application of new methods in teaching, and therefore it is necessary to indicate the importance of empowering professional competences of the teacher for contemporary and individualized teaching of students.

The obtained results indicate the existence of many limitations which can have an effect on the generalization of this research. Because there is not enough conducted research in the field of the application of support strategies and individualized teaching in our country, it is necessary to observe the results with caution and based on the socially acceptable answers when conducting the questionnaire. Namely, based on the results we don't really know that the teachers are really doing what they say they are doing. However, all the teachers were asked to be honest and that their answers are confidential. The next limitation refers to the representation of the sample because the demographic data of the subjects indicate very different abilities in the equipment of schools with technology and tools like for example an interactive boards, tablets or computers with Bluetooth devices and such, because of the area where the subjects live and work and who have different possibilities to regularly professionally train. However, the significance of this data in this field and the practical information which this research provides for education practitioners surpass these limitations.

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