

# Comparison of Teachers and Teaching Assistants' Perspective of Necessary Teaching Assistant Competences

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## Abstract

*This study is a part of the project titled “The Role of Teaching Assistants from the Perspective of Teachers and Teaching Assistants”, conducted by Lifelong Learning Centre IDEM and the Centre for Inclusive Support IDEM. The aim of this research was to determine what teachers and teaching assistants view as necessary competences of teaching assistants and to analyse them in accordance with the inclusive education approach. The qualitative research method was used and focus group interviews with 69 participants (40 teachers and 29 teaching assistants) were conducted in primary schools in three Croatian cities. Transcribed focus group interviews, general questionnaire data and school documentation provided the empirical base for qualitative data analysis. Framework analysis was used to achieve a more in-depth look into teachers and teaching assistants' viewpoints regarding necessary teaching assistant competences. The results show that the examined perspectives of teachers and teaching assistants only partly coincide, and more so when it comes to personal than professional competences of teaching assistants. The fact is that teachers and teaching assistants have to cooperate during the teaching process. Therefore, they should have a clear idea of what an assistant's role is and what personal and professional competences they should have in an inclusive classroom. It can be expected that the results of this study, conducted 10 years after teaching assistants were introduced into the Croatian education system, will be used in legal regulation of the teaching assistant profession.*

**Key words:** *competences of teaching assistants; education; qualitative research.*

## Introduction

Exercise of the right to education for pupils with special educational needs is a major challenge in the field of education policies, both in Croatia and globally. It is for that reason that support systems focused on increasing the accessibility of schools were developed in the world, especially after the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) was adopted.

For the past two decades, Croatian research has focused on finding effective mechanisms for achieving inclusion. At the same time, Croatian national strategies and programmes aimed at children with special educational needs (National Strategy for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2007 – 2015, 2007; National Action Plan for the Rights and Interests of Children 2006 – 2012, 2006) introduced support systems for inclusive education. *The Regulation on Primary and Secondary Education of Students with Developmental Disabilities* (2015) ensured normative conditions for some of the key forms of support: a team of experts as a mobile multidisciplinary support service, support centres, school coordinator for special educational needs, and teaching assistants.

In the Croatian education system, the most common form of supporting inclusive education has been the introduction of teaching assistants. The number of teaching assistants grew exponentially, from 209 assistants in the school year 2009/2010 to over 3500 assistants in 2018/2019, when *the Regulation on Teaching Assistants and Communication Intermediaries* (2018) was passed. Experiences of countries with functional inclusive education systems already in place were used during the process of introducing teaching assistants into schools. Accordingly, the role of teaching assistants was directed towards supporting the realisation of children's rights to education in mainstream schools and classes alongside their peers.

Global research to date has focused primarily on the role of teaching assistants in supporting inclusion and on the competences required for this profession. According to Vincent et al. (2005), personal competences of teaching assistants, such as patience, sense of humour, teamwork skills and understanding for pupils, were valued in practice as more important than their professional competences and qualifications. An extensive meta-study (EPPI Review, 2003; Cajkler et al., 2007) analysed the role of professional training of teaching assistants and the relevant factors influencing educational policies regarding the role of teaching assistants in order to shed light on this under-researched topic. The results indicated several problems, such as the temporary nature of employment of teaching assistants, low wages, the danger of isolating the pupil who is assigned a teaching assistant, and teaching assistant training. In their longitudinal study, Blatchford et al. (2007) highlighted various forms of support provided by teaching assistants in schools, from specialist ones (ICT) to ones that are more general. Furthermore, they, as well as authors Giangreco and Doyle (2007), stipulated the importance of the pedagogical role played by teaching assistants in the education process, which contributes to their role in supporting inclusion.

Great Britain passed the National Occupational Standards Level 2 and 3, that regulate teaching assistance as a profession, as early as in 2001, while NVQ 3 from 2003 enable teaching assistants to progress to a higher level within their profession and become Higher Level Teaching Assistants (Watkinson, 2008). This is how training programmes for beginners, NVQ Level 2 and 3 (Bentham & Hutchins, 2008), and those for teaching assistants striving to advance their career (HLTA, 2006) came to be. As of 2015, there are also *Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants* (Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants, 2016). Furthermore, several national organisations (UNISON, NAHT – National Association of Head Teachers, NET – National Education Trust, London Leadership Strategy and Maximising Teaching Assistants) published instructions for all school staff members regarding the implementation of the Standards, with the help of scientists and experts working in practice and at universities. It was defined that teaching assistants represent all forms of support in class related to learning and supporting the pupil as well as that teaching assistants should be employed by the school, while some can be employed as part of a service provided by the local government to schools. According to these standards, the basic teaching tasks of teaching assistants are using an appropriate approach to teaching and learning via adapted strategies and assisting teachers and all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs. Additionally, the role of teaching assistants includes promoting and encouraging inclusion. The levels of responsibility vary depending on the teaching assistant's level of competences. More recent research (Bowles et al. 2018), focusing on teaching strategies based on pupil self-initiative, also highlights the importance of the pedagogical role played by teaching assistants.

First informal training programmes for teaching assistants in Croatia were organised by the Inclusion Support Centre IDEM in the wake of introducing teaching assistants into schools in 2005. In 2012, the Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education approved the Training Programme for Teaching Assistants (based on the proposal of distinguished inclusion experts from the Lifelong Learning Centre IDEM), resulting in the Ministry of Science and Education authorising the Lifelong Learning Centre IDEM to conduct the first teaching assistant training programme. The practice in Croatia is to strive to raise the teaching assistants' competences through ESF projects, via short informative trainings, as well as via handbooks for teaching assistants on the municipal level (Velki & Romstein, 2015).

The current roles of teaching assistants in Croatian practice are not only varied, but over time came to include some activities that inadvertently lead to the isolation of the pupil, instead of contributing to the pupil feeling accepted by their peers in class. Although the first Croatian qualitative research of the role of teaching assistants was conducted as a part of the international project titled "Development towards the Inclusive School: Practices – Research – Capacity Building" during 2007 and 2008 (Igrić & Cvitković, 2013), there have only been a few other studies focusing on teaching assistants to date, all of them quantitative.

The Inclusion Support Centre IDEM and the Lifelong Learning Centre IDEM conducted a one-year project titled “The Role of Teaching Assistants from the Perspective of Teachers and Teaching Assistants”. The project sought to obtain scientifically based answers to the questions of who teaching assistants are in today’s schools, what competences teachers expect them to have, what jobs teaching assistants do as well as who assists them in the process.

The results of the project indicated that teaching assistants perceive their job as temporary and they only work as teaching assistants until they find a position more in line with their formal education. Teaching assistants come from various educational backgrounds, from economists and teachers to engineers. They do not usually stay employed as teaching assistants for longer than one school year, which reflects negatively on the quality of support given to pupils because the pupil has to adapt repeatedly to new teaching assistants. Moreover, new teaching assistants have to be introduced to the required approaches when working with a specific pupil as well as cooperating with teachers, non-teaching school staff and parents. Now, 10 years after teaching assistants were first introduced into schools, the results of the project about the role of teaching assistants indicate that their most important roles, from the perspective of teachers and teaching assistants, include learning support, behavioural support and activities conducted with other pupils in the class (Matejčić & Bambir, 2018).

As Croatia is in the process of developing professional and qualification standards for teaching assistants, it is important to gain insight into the competences that the teachers who have cooperated with teaching assistants view as appropriate and necessary. Moreover, it is vital to examine how well the current teaching assistant selection processes serve the needs of teachers and inclusive education, as well as which competences need to be developed through teaching assistant training programmes.

## **Research aim and research questions**

This research aimed to define teaching assistants’ competences and analyse them in accordance with the inclusive approach to education that enables children with special educational needs (SEN) to exercise their right to education alongside their peers. This paper will describe the competences of teaching assistants that teachers view as important for working in primary schools as well as the competences teaching assistants already have and how they perceive them.

Thus, the research questions were as follows:

- 1 What competences do teachers perceive as required of teaching assistants in order to work in a mainstream primary school?
- 2 How do teaching assistants perceive the required competences for performing their current job?
- 3 To what degree does the teachers’ perspective of the required teaching assistant competences coincide with their actual competences and perspective of these competences?

## **Research methods**

### ***Participants and the research procedure***

The research was conducted in 7 primary schools in 3 Croatian cities with approximately 5000 pupils, 341 of which were pupils with SEN. The schools were chosen according to the following criteria:

- the researcher's history of cooperation with the school regarding the introduction of teaching assistants into the school via 20-hour teaching assistant trainings and occasional supervisions of teaching assistants and teaching assistant coordinators;
- the extent of the school's experience of using teaching assistants;
- the number of teaching assistants in the school.

Unfortunately, some of the schools with extensive experience of using teaching assistants and cooperating with the Inclusive Support Centre IDEM via teaching assistant coordinators and teachers did not meet the criteria of currently employing at least five teaching assistants.

In cooperation with school teaching assistant coordinators, the General Questionnaire for Teachers and the General Questionnaire for teaching assistants were used to survey certain features of teachers, teaching assistants, and the school climate. The questionnaires were applied on a sample of 81 teachers and 48 teaching assistants. The obtained data were used to select teachers for the qualitative part of the research and to triangulate the focus group interview data in order to increase the objectivity of the research.

The qualitative part of the research involved 69 participants, of which 40 teachers and 29 teaching assistants. As stated above, teachers were chosen based on the General Questionnaire for Teachers that all teachers willing to participate in the research filled in. During the selection process, specific features were considered, such as years of work experience, years of experience in working with teaching assistants, whether they taught lower grades (grades 1 – 4) or a specific subject in higher grades (grades 5 – 8), and what subject they taught. The majority of teachers (33) had more than 20 years of experience working in schools. The ratio of class and subject teachers was 20:20. The group of teaching assistants included all available teaching assistants from the same schools as the chosen teachers. The majority of teaching assistants were between the ages of 27 and 34 (16), with an approximately equal number of younger and older teaching assistants.

The focus group interviews were conducted in participating schools. In two smaller towns, where the schools were not far apart, one school served as the venue for a single focus group interview with teaching assistants from both schools, while a single focus group interview with teachers from both schools was conducted in the other. In the larger city, three focus groups were done with teachers, each in the school where the given group of teachers worked, in order to ensure their participation considering the significant distance between schools. All available teaching assistants from those

three schools constituted a single focus group and were interviewed at the Inclusion Support Centre IDEM, which is approximately equidistant from all three schools.

Group sizes ranged from 7 to 10 participants. The focus group interviews were conducted based on semi-structured focus group interviews for teachers and teaching assistants, with each interview lasting 90 minutes.

Theory-based topics<sup>1</sup> of the focus interview for teachers were: teaching experience in school and with teaching assistants, description of the tasks of teaching assistants, cooperation with teaching assistants and experts for children with special educational needs, the relationship between teaching assistants and other pupils as well as required knowledge, characteristics, and skills of a teaching assistant. As it is generally assumed that teaching assistant competences valued by class and subject teachers are different, twenty minutes of the focus group interview were dedicated to discussions in the two subgroups, whereby class and subject teachers discussed the topics separately. Each subgroup wrote down what they considered necessary teaching assistant competences on a large sheet of paper and then ranked the top 10. Then, during the rest of the focus group, all teachers discussed the similarities and differences of what the two subgroups listed as priority competences.

The theory-based topics of the focus interview for teaching assistants were teaching assistant work qualifications, cooperation with teachers, teaching assistants coordinators, parents, description of their tasks in the classroom, required knowledge, skills and characteristics and professional prospects.

The author of this paper conducted each focus group interview together with one of the project associates. The project associates, experts in educational rehabilitation, noted down non-verbal communications and important milestones during the focus group interview. The main interviewer is an experienced group therapist and supervisor who established an air of trust within which the participants could share their thoughts and feelings. All participants voluntarily took part in the research. The focus group interviews were recorded as audio files and anonymity of data was ensured by marking the recorded statements in code-numbers.

### ***Methods of data analysis***

Data gathered from general questionnaires were entered into Excel spreadsheets and the NVivo11 software, followed by the distribution of summary data for each variable into classes. The transcripts of focus-group interviews, the data from general questionnaires and school documentation constitute the empirical database for qualitative data analysis. Two researchers conducted the data analysis by consulting with the third researcher. In addition to data and methods triangulation, this procedure ensured higher credibility of the research.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this article, theory based topics are defined as a broader term than a theme, which denotes topics that have been excluded prior to the research, based on available theoretical background.

To provide better insight from the standpoint of teachers and teaching assistants who participated in this research, the framework analysis was applied (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Framework analysis is often employed in applied research in the field of social policies, when the aim of the research is to obtain information required by certain institutions entrusted with policy implementation (Pope et al., 2000). In this case, the findings of the research will be used for adopting the new professional standard in defining the occupation and qualification standards for teaching assistants by the Ministry of Science and Education and the Ministry of Labour and Pension System within the framework of inclusive education policy (The Croatian Parliament, 2014).

The key themes identified in the research project “Role of Teaching Assistants from the Perspective of Teachers and Teaching Assistants” represent the initial framework for qualitative data collection (research questions and questions in focus-group interviews) and data analysis.

With teachers, data-based topics<sup>2</sup> are as follows:

- 1 experience of teachers working with pupils with special educational needs and teaching assistants;
- 2 teachers' perception of pupils;
- 3 teachers' perception of teaching assistants with respect to the assistant's tasks and competences;
- 4 cooperation of teaching assistants;
- 5 cooperation of teachers.

With teaching assistants, the data-based topics are as follows:

- 1 Experience and qualifications of teaching assistants;
- 2 Teaching assistant's perception of pupils with special educational needs;
- 3 Teaching assistant's tasks;
- 4 Cooperation of teaching assistants;
- 5 Professional prospects of teaching assistants;
- 6 Relationship of teaching assistants with other pupils.

Initial themes were defined based on other countries' knowhow and experience with the implementation of inclusive education policy, as well as on global research and a decade long practice in Croatia as regards the role of the teaching assistant and on the issues raised in interviews with participants. The themes selected for analysis in this paper include:

- 1 *Necessary competences required for the job of teaching assistants from the perspective of teachers*, within the data-based topic Teachers' perception of teaching assistants with respect to the assistant's tasks and competences;

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this article, data-based topics are defined as a broader term than a theme, each encompassing several similar themes. They differ from a theory-based topics because they have been defined based on the data obtained by qualitative research, whereas theory-based topics were excluded prior to the research, based on the available theoretical background.

- 2 *Necessary competences required for the job of teaching assistants from the perspective of the teaching assistant*, within the data-based topic Experience and qualification of teaching assistants.

Although this approach reflects the original observations and reflections of the researchers collecting the data, the data is more structured and the analysis simpler (Pope et al., 2000; Lacey & Luff, 2007) than in some other forms of qualitative data analysis. This method allows for identification of new themes that were not defined in the original analysis framework. All audio recordings were transcribed and then structured. The participants' statements in respect to the research questions, whether whole or segmented, were used as the unit of analysis. The following steps of qualitative analysis were used in the study:

- 1 studying and editing the empirical data, reading the transcripts – extracting important statements;
- 2 identifying the thematic framework – identifying all key questions, concepts and themes. In this step, the researches relied on the questions that originate from the aim of the research, as well as the questions posed by the participants themselves;
- 3 paraphrasing the transcript of all participants' answers regarding teaching assistants' competences;
- 4 coding the extracted statements with respect to the themes – preliminary coding;
- 5 classifying preliminary codes into the following final codes/categories:
  - a) teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants,
  - b) teachers' perspective of personal competences of teaching assistants,
  - c) teaching assistants' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants,
  - d) teaching assistants' perspective of personal competences of teaching assistants;
- 6 interpreting the results with respect to the themes *teachers' perspective on teacher assistants' competences* and *teaching assistants' perspective on teaching assistants' competences*.

## Results and discussion

### ***Teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants***

As teachers and teaching assistants act together in the class as partners, efficient cooperation is important to teachers. Good cooperation of teachers and teaching assistants is key for providing quality support for pupils with special educational needs and achieving inclusive class environment. The prerequisite for such cooperation is knowing which competences teachers consider necessary in teaching assistants.

Therefore, as regards the topic *teachers' perception of teaching assistants* with respect to assistant's tasks and competences, this paper will analyse the theme *teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants*. Based on the analysis and the interpretation of data collected in five focus-group interviews with teachers, as well



as the data from general questionnaires and school documentation, the professional and personal competences of teaching assistants were categorized (Table 1). The codes of all participants are listed in the following results.

Table 1

*Categories of the theme Teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants*

| Theme    | Teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants |  |
|----------|--|--|
| Category | Teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants | Teachers' perspective of personal competences of teaching assistants |

*Professional competences*

Tables 2 and 3 include data for the category Teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants.

Table 2

*Teachers' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants – focus-group interview*

| Professional competences                  | FGT 1        | FGT 2        | FGT 3                        | FGT 4 | FGT 5        |
|---|--------------|--------------|------------------------------|-------|--------------|
| Pedagogical background                    | 6237<br>7240 | 5232<br>3217 | 2213                         | 1204  |              |
| Knowledge about special educational needs |              |              |                              |       | 3220<br>3219 |
| Expertise/ content of the subject         |              | 4224<br>4226 | 2209<br>2213<br>2215<br>2214 |       | 3223         |
| Higher education                          |              |              | 2209<br>2213                 |       | 3222<br>3219 |

Legend: FGT – focus group of teachers

As shown in Table 2, teachers have marked pedagogical background as a required competence of teaching assistants in four out of five focus groups. In the focus group interview, pedagogical background was marked mostly by class teachers with longer work experience and with experience of several years in working with teaching assistants. Some of them think that teaching assistants need to have pedagogical background, but not necessarily higher education. One subject teacher in focus group 4 asserts, “Teaching assistant needs to have pedagogical background to be able to apply education methods when working with a pupil and with the entire class” (1204). When class and subject teachers discussed in subgroups (Table 3) and ranked the competences according to their importance, subject teachers ranked pedagogical background as second most important in three focus groups, and in one focus group class and subject teachers ranked pedagogical background equally high. Subject teachers regarded knowledge about special educational needs a priority competence only in one focus group.

Table 3

Priority professional competences of teaching assistants from the perspective of class and subject teachers

| Professional competences                  | FGT 1     |           | FGT 2     |    | FGT 3     |           | FGT 4 |           | FGT 5     |           |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|----|-----------|-----------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|   | LG        | HG        | LG        | HG | LG        | HG        | LG    | HG        | LG        | HG        |
| Teacher's vocation                        |           |           |           |    |           |           |       |           |           |           |
| Pedagogical background                    | <b>2.</b> | <b>2.</b> | X         | X  | X         | <b>5.</b> | X     | <b>2.</b> | X         | <b>2.</b> |
| Knowledge about special educational needs | X         | X         | X         | X  | X         | X         | X     | X         | X         | <b>4.</b> |
| Expertise/ content of the subject         | X         | X         | <b>3.</b> | X  | <b>1.</b> | X         | X     | X         | <b>2.</b> | X         |
| Higher education                          | X         | X         | X         | X  | X         | X         | X     | X         | X         | X         |

Legend: FGT – focus group of teachers; LG – lower grades; HG – higher grades, teaching a specific subject; (No. bold) – professional competences ranked 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> place

Three groups have asserted that the teaching assistant's expertise and familiarity with the subject content was an important competence. This is illustrated in teachers' opinion that "Sometimes a pupil only needs assistance with learning and, when the assistant does not understand, the teacher cannot explain the material to the assistant so that he/she can convey it to the pupil" (1223). Following the discussion in subgroups, three focus groups ranked expertise highly, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Based on the context analysis, such importance attributed to the expertise may be explained by experience of the teachers who were themselves teaching assistants as trainees or had good experiences with trainee teaching assistants. The perspective of both class and subjects teachers is similar, wherein class teachers prefer trainee class teachers and subject teachers prefer assistants who are either subject teachers or have a degree in humanities. Their experiences with assistants range from one year to 12 years. In discussions of teachers divided into groups according to vocation (Table 3), higher education was not mentioned as competence. However, higher education was mentioned in the interview of the entire focus group (Table 1), specifically in two focus groups where teachers stated that "Assistants with higher education had a better idea of what they can achieve in their work" (3219) and that "Such assistants are more persistent" (3222).

Interestingly, only some of the teachers in focus group interviews mentioned the need for assistants' professional competence, regardless of their years in service or their experience with assistants. The commitment to a certain aspect of professional competence can be associated with school's practice of choosing assistants (preference for trainee teachers as assistants).

### Personal competences

As shown in Tables 4 and 5, focus groups of teachers emphasized nine personal competences of assistants.

Table 4

*Teachers' perspective of personal competences of teaching assistants – focus-group interview*

| Personal competences                            | FGT 1 | FGT 2 | FGT 3 | FGT 4 | FGT 5 |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Motivation/commitment                           |       | 4229  |       |       |       |
|   |       | 4224  | 2216  | 1207  | 3219  |
|   |       | 5233  |       |       |       |
| Empathy   |       |       | 2209  |       |       |
|   |       |       | 2213  | 1204  |       |
|   |       | 5232  | 2211  | 1208  |       |
|   |       |       | 2216  |       |       |
| Communication skills/<br>team work/ cooperation | 7242  |       | 2214  |       | 3219  |
|   |       |       |       | 2216  | 3222  |
|   |       |       |       | 2213  |       |
| Understanding                                   |       | 5233  | 2209  | 1207  | 3221  |
|   |       |       | 2213  | 1203  |       |
| Consistency                                     |       | 5233  |       | 1205  |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1208  |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1207  |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1206  |       |
| Patience  |       |       |       | 1203  |       |
|   |       |       | 2211  | 201   |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1208  |       |
| Tolerance                                       |       |       |       | 1208  |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1203  |       |
| Accountability                                  |       |       | 2211  | 1206  |       |
| Integrity                                       |       |       |       | 1205  |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1204  |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1208  |       |
|   |       |       |       | 1206  |       |

Legend: FGT – focus group of teachers

Teachers consider teaching assistants' motivation important: "It is important that an assistant wants to do the job" (4224). In the group of motivational competences they attempt to define this particular competence as being focused, interested, "mindful", the will to work and succeed. Interestingly, class teachers believe that the assistant's motivation is reflected in love for children and proper organization of work, while subject teachers associate it with commitment. In one focus group, motivation/commitment was not mentioned in the interview nor included in the first eight priority competences.

Subject teachers ranked motivation 1st to 6th place in three focus groups. Specifically, motivation as commitment was ranked 1st place in one group, and it was ranked as the second priority in terms of desire to succeed and work in another. In two focus groups this competence was ranked similarly (3rd and 4th place) by both class and subject teachers.

Table 5

Priority personal competences of teaching assistants from the perspective of class and subject teachers

| Personal competences                       | FGT 1 |           | FGT 2     |           | FGT 3     |           | FGT 4     |           | FGT 5     |           |
|--|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|  | LG    | HG        | LG        | HG        | LG        | HG        | LG        | HG        | LG        | HG        |
| Teacher's vocation                         |       |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
| Motivation/commitment                      | X     | X         | X         | <b>2.</b> | <b>3.</b> | <b>1.</b> | X         | 6.        | 4.        | <b>3.</b> |
| Empathy                                    | 5.    | X         | 5.        | <b>1.</b> | <b>2.</b> | 7.        | <b>2.</b> | 5.        | <b>1.</b> | <b>1.</b> |
| Communication skills/team work/cooperation | 5.    | <b>1.</b> | 8.        | 6.        | 5.        | <b>4.</b> | 5.        | <b>4.</b> | <b>3.</b> | 7.        |
| Understanding                              | X     | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         |
| Consistency                                | X     | X         | 6.        | 10.       | X         | X         | <b>2.</b> | 7.        | X         | 7.        |
| Patience                                   | 5.    | <b>3.</b> | <b>1.</b> | <b>4.</b> | X         | <b>3.</b> | <b>1.</b> | <b>1.</b> | X         | X         |
| Tolerance                                  | X     | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         |
| Accountability                             | X     | X         | X         | X         | <b>4.</b> | X         | <b>4.</b> | <b>3.</b> | X         | X         |
| Integrity                                  | X     | X         | X         | X         | X         | X         | 6.        | X         | X         | X         |

Legend: FGT – focus group of teachers; LG – lower grades teachers (class teachers); HG – higher grades teachers (subject teachers)  
 (No. bold) – Personal competences ranked 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> place

In focus-group interviews (Table 4), empathy was mentioned in three out of five focus groups. Teachers associate empathy with understanding pupils and use terms such as love for children, warmth and compassion. For example, “*Empathy means love for a child and includes patience and considerable strength*” (2211). This social and emotional competence is important for teachers with 5 to 32 years of work experience and at least 3 years of experience with assistants or teachers who were assistants themselves. In subgroup discussions of class and subject teachers (Table 5), empathy was ranked among the first five priorities in all five focus groups, and it was mentioned by both teacher categories in four focus groups (although the ranking was different). In one focus group, empathy was ranked as the most important for both teacher groups. It cannot be stated that empathy is always more important to class teachers as subject teachers considered it the most important competence in one focus group. In subgroup discussions, teachers associated empathy with helping children and kindness.

Teachers refer to Communication skills/Team work/Cooperation in statements such as “*Communication is more important than specific knowledge*” (7244, a subject teacher with 24 years of work experience and 9 years of experience with assistants) or “*An assistant’s willingness to talk with an expert and the ability to listen*” (1203, a subject teacher with 26 years of work experience and 6 years of experience with assistants).

Teachers associate communication skills with the assistant's inclination to teamwork and cooperation, primarily with teachers and parents. Teachers with 6 – 41 years of experience, who have had assistants for 3 up to 12 years, consider this competence important. In all five focus groups, this competence is ranked among the first eight competences for both groups of teachers, yet with different levels of importance.

For the participants of focus-group interviews, understanding for pupils meant compassion, acceptance of difficulties and tolerance for pupils' conduct, as well as finding the appropriate method of cooperation with pupils. This competence was not considered a priority in any of the teacher focus groups, but it is present in both teacher categories with more than 5 years of experience (schools in larger cities). It is a key competence, as it indicates that assistants know their pupils, understand their conduct and learning capacities, as well as the appropriate teaching method.

Participants of one focus group from the same school (class teachers) have especially emphasised consistency: *"The assistant must not be a pupil's servant, he/she must be consistent and should not take the path of the least resistance; The assistant must follow the agreed rules and respect the set boundaries"* (1208). These teachers have 13 to 28 years of work experience. The fact that the class teachers emphasize competence is understandable, as consistency is one of the key approaches to education and establishing work habits very early on in all children, including children with special educational needs.

Patience is considered very important by the same focus group supporting the importance of consistency and understanding: *"An assistant should have patience, as things need to be repeated several times"* (1201). Both class and subject teachers mentioned this personal competence, which is reflected in the ranking. This competence was chosen by participants with 7 – 26 years of work experience and with the experience of working with assistant for 4 – 8 years. In four focus groups, patience was ranked 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> place. Both class and subject teachers ranked it the same way in three focus groups, and this competence was ranked as 1<sup>st</sup> in two focus groups. In two groups of class teachers, this competence was ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, and the perception of its importance was shared by both class and subject teachers in three groups. What does this competence mean? It shows that the teachers expect assistants to adjust to the pupil and not to require more than the pupil's abilities allow. The teachers have also had assistants who were not successful in adjusting to the developmental dynamics of individual pupils.

Tolerance was mentioned in only one focus-group interview: *"An assistant must tolerate the pupil's special educational needs"* (1208). Tolerance was not ranked among the first 10 competences in any of the groups. As tolerance does not mean acceptance, the fact that teachers do not consider tolerance to be a desirable competence of an assistant may indicate a desirable perspective.

Accountability was rarely mentioned in the interview. In separate discussions of teachers, class and subject teachers accountability was mentioned in two focus groups: it was ranked 4<sup>th</sup> place by class teachers and 3<sup>rd</sup> place by subject teachers in one focus group. We assume that teachers mostly consider accountability to be primarily the

tasks of teachers and non-teaching expert staff, with assistants only following their respective instructions. As for the schools where accountability was ranked among top four competencies, the context analysis indicates such ranking is a result of high quality, well-educated assistants on the one hand, and/or lack of experts who could adjust teaching material to pupils' needs, on the other.

As a required personal competence, integrity was mentioned in only one focus group. Integrity implies benevolence and the ability to perceive one's work as good or poor. It was ranked 6<sup>th</sup> place and the explanation includes, for example: "*One must act in good conscience... One cannot be one person with the teacher and a different person with the parent ... one cannot recount certain things*" (1208).

In addition to previously mentioned competences, additional individual competences were mentioned in focus groups, such as persistence, flexibility, cordiality, "speaking kindly to pupils", objectivity, "no mask" and "humanity – helping all who need help".

Better understanding of the teachers' perspective of teaching assistants' competences is gained from the observations of teachers such as them being bothered by "the teaching assistant working loudly with the pupil, so I sometimes send them to a separate room" (5232). Other things that bother teachers are that "the teaching assistant sometimes reacts like an older sister, takes out the class material, which isn't necessary" or that "the teaching assistant isn't qualified to work with children with such severe disabilities nor does she have pedagogical background" so "the teacher must educate her" or that "the teaching assistant is frightened by the severity of the child's disability" (6237), or "a poorly-skilled teaching assistant does more damage than the pupil having no assistant at all" (1206). In three focus groups, teachers complained about teaching assistants' inappropriate approaches to working with pupils: being rigid in their approach, being "overly-protective", "they just didn't 'click' with the pupils", yelling at the pupils, not being adequately prepared for work, the relationship with other pupils is not always appropriate, teaching assistants often change, they take the path of least resistance and some of them lack the necessary sensibility. Such experiences were usually found in schools that do not have a full expert team (they lack a special educational needs teaching expert).

On the other hand, there were many positive teacher experiences as well, regardless of the school context, the length of teachers' work experience and experience in working with teaching assistants: "*They are a great help to teachers in that they can work with other children and so the pupil feels safe*" (2209); "*The environment in the whole class is better*" (6236); "*It is easier to work in a class with a teaching assistant*" (7243); "*They follow instructions*" (4226); "*Outgoing, patient, flexible*" (4229); "*Moral support to others, has worked in the school for a number of years*" (5231).

Almost all teachers emphasised personal competences, *mostly empathy and communication skills*, followed by motivation, understanding, consistency and patience. All focus groups, even the subgroups, listed empathy and communication skills as necessary competences. These competences were especially important to teachers

with more work experience and a more extensive experience of working with teaching assistants. Both class and subject teachers highlight empathy, while subject teachers even marked it as the most important competence in two focus groups. Class and subject teachers defined “motivation” differently. Class teachers define it within the context of love towards children, while subject teachers associate it with engagement. In one of eight focus groups, motivation was not listed within the top eight competences. The same group that does not consider motivation to be a priority is the only group that listed communication skills as the most important competence. Context analysis suggests that in that case cooperation is managed through organised work with teaching assistants so the quality of teaching assistants’ work depends less on their individual motivation to work.

Consistency was only listed at a high second place in one focus group, again by one of experienced teachers and those with an extensive experience of working with teaching assistants (4 to 8 years). Considering the importance of this competence, it should be present more. The same focus group highlighted patience, although patience was present in all but one other focus group. In this case, patience could be synonymous with knowing the child and adapting the tasks to their abilities and interests, regardless of the different developmental level of their peers. Another specific feature was presence of responsibility in the participants’ answers, which appeared to be connected with teachers’ experiences in their schools regarding the selection of teaching assistants and types of experts they could consult.

Thus, the answer to the first research question could be that teachers perceive the importance of teaching assistants’ professional and personal competences, although they could state more clearly which personal competences they consider important and which professional ones they deem necessary. When it comes to professional skills, teachers value pedagogical background and adequate education the most. Among personal competences, they emphasised empathy and communication skills as the most important, with motivation and patience somewhat lower on their list of priorities. The choice of competences seemed to be influenced by context, primarily by the teachers’ experiences in their own schools. The way the local government organised the work of teaching assistants also influenced teachers’ experiences and perspectives of teaching assistants’ competences, as there is no statewide legislation on the required competences for the teaching assistant position.

### ***Teaching assistants’ perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants***

The theme *Teaching assistants’ perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants* was derived from the topic in qualitative research on teaching assistants, *Experience and qualification of teaching assistants for working with pupils with special educational needs*. The qualitative analysis provided categories of professional and personal competences of teaching assistants (Table 6).

Table 6

Categories of Teaching assistants' perspective of competences of teaching assistants theme

| Theme    | Teaching assistants' perspective of competences of teaching assistants              |   |
|----------|---|---|
| Category | Teaching assistants' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants | Teaching assistants' perspective of personal competences of teaching assistants |

### **Professional competences**

Table 7 includes professional competences of teaching assistants from the perspective of teaching assistants.

Professional competences of teaching assistants vary by cities and schools. All three focus groups included employed teaching assistants with high-school education and graduates in social or technical studies. Focus groups 1 and 3 additionally included students and assistants with pedagogical background. One assistant in focus group 1 was expert for pupils with special educational needs. Focus group 2 included assistants with secondary education and university degree with pedagogical background, as well as university graduates in other social and technical studies. Focus group 3 (three schools in a larger city) included assistants with secondary education, students and graduates with pedagogical background, as well as graduates in other social and technical studies.

As regards their qualification for the assistant job, it is noteworthy that all the assistants with high-school education completed the training for teaching assistants. However, some of the assistants who were students and/or graduates did not complete 20 or 218 hours of training. Teaching assistants in focus group 1 – a student and two graduates in social and technical studies – did not complete the training. In focus groups 2 and 3, the assistants who are graduates with pedagogical background did not complete the training, and an assistant from group 3, who is a graduate of social studies, did not complete the training either.

In addition to assistants with secondary education, some of the assistants who are students and graduates in social and technical studies in two focus groups in smaller towns (focus groups 1 and 2), and one assistant with pedagogical background in focus group 2, have completed 20 hours of training. Two assistants with secondary education in focus groups 1 and 3 and three assistants with degrees in focus group 3 have completed 218 hours of training for assistants. Some assistants completed additional trainings in sign language (7125), autistic spectrum disorders (7127) and Down syndrome (“*The assistant completed the training in the Down Syndrome Association and she occasionally comes upon the proposal of the parents*” (3107)), which is an improvement of their professional competences. The assistants stated the importance of their experience in working with preschool children or as coaches (6122), as well as their graduation in social studies (2106). They did not consider 20 hours of training to be sufficient (7124, 6121), while those who completed 218 hours of training were satisfied with the knowledge they acquired (1101, 1104). Some assistants emphasized the importance of



Table 7  
Teaching assistants' perspective of professional competences of teaching assistants

| Professional qualifications               | Training for assistants                          | Professional competences                                     |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|--|
|   |  | FGA 1  | FGA 1  | FGA 3  |
| High school education                     | No training                                      |  |  |  |
|   | 20 hours of training                             |  | 4110<br>5119<br>5118                                   |  |
|   | 218 hours of training                            | 7125   |  | 1101   |
| Student or graduate                       | No training                                      | 6123   |  |  |
|   | 20 hours of training                             | 6121   |  | 3108   |
| College graduates or university graduates | No training                                      | 6120 (social studies)<br>6122 (technical studies)            |  | 2106 (218 hours of training)   |
|   | 20 hours of training                             | 7127 (218 hours of training)<br>7124 (218 hours of training) | 4112 (218 hours education)<br>5117 (technical studies) |  |
|   | 218 hours of training                            |  |  | 1103 (technical studies)<br>1104 (technical studies)<br>" 1102 (technical studies) |
|   | Expertise/ content of the subject                |  |  |  |
|   | Knowledge about special educational needs        | Educational rehabilitation study                             | 7126   |  |
| Pedagogical background                    | No training of 20 /218 hours                     |  | 4115 (lower grades)                                    | 3107 (lower grades)  |
|   | Pedagogical background with 20 hours of training |  | 4114 (lower grades)                                    |  |

Legend: FGA – focus group of assistants

knowledge and ongoing professional training (1103, 4114). The differences between assistants from various schools can be observed in the comparison of schools in the larger city: while the assistants without training in one school believe they have acquired the necessary knowledge in their past experience and their degree in social studies to be a useful source of knowledge, the assistants in another school, who have all completed 218 hours of training, continue to take any opportunity to learn and feel the training was very helpful.

### **Personal competences**

Table 8 shows how assistants perceive their personal competences for the teaching assistant's tasks.

Table 8

*Teaching assistants' perspective of personal competences of teaching assistants*

| Personal competences                 | FGA 1 | FGA 2                        | FGA 3 |
|--------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------|-------|
| Empathy                              | 7127  | 4110, 4109, 4111, 5118       | 1101  |
| Communication skills/<br>cooperation |       |                              | 2106  |
| Understanding                        |       | 4111                         |       |
| Patience                             |       | 4109, 4112, 4113, 4114, 5116 | 1103  |
| Personal Experience as<br>parents    |       | 4111, 4113, 5118, 5119       | 1102  |
| Flexibility                          |       | 4112, 4114, 5116             |       |
| Intuition                            | 6123  |                              |       |

Legend: FGA – focus group of assistants

In all three focus groups of assistants, empathy was mentioned as an important personal competence, e.g. *“It is important for an assistant to love children”* (1101). In two focus groups (2 and 3), the participants mentioned patience (*“Assistant needs to be patient due to the nature of the work”*, 1103) and personal experience as parents (5118, 1102). In addition to these personal competences, assistants in focus group 2 also mentioned flexibility (*“This work calls for flexibility in order to adjust to child's needs”*, 5116) and understanding. In focus group 3, in addition to empathy, patience and personal experience as parents, participants mentioned communication skills (*“knowledge of communication acquired at the university”* 2106). One assistant, student who did not complete the training, had an interesting stance: *“No preparation is needed, as you must ‘read’ the child. It is not something you can learn from books”* (6123).

Such thinking is understandable, as most of the assistants – whether those with secondary education and only 20 hours of training or those with a degree in social sciences not including pedagogical background or a degree in technical studies - have insufficient knowledge of working with pupils with special educational needs. Many

of them were obviously driven by empathy for children and rely on patience when working with children. If they have not familiarized themselves with the details of the documentation and have no clear picture of the level and way of a pupil's functioning, then patience is their main tool in dealing with learning and behaviour challenges. We have learned in this research that teaching assistants looking for a new occupation – especially those over 35 years of age – can be extremely motivated. This applies especially to women who stayed at home with their children, were not employed and had no additional training in their respective professions. Such women consider the job of a teaching assistant to be appropriate for them and find the experience of supporting their children in education to be adequate.

The teaching assistant job is new both for teaching assistants and teachers so teaching assistants must often be resourceful in new situations and willing to seek new approaches to pupils and communication with teachers and parents. Therefore, they feel flexibility is the key. The importance of communication skills was mentioned only in one focus group (assistants' focus group 3). Most of the teaching assistants still do not understand the importance of communication skills, especially if they have not completed the necessary training.

The answer to the second research question lies in the conclusion that only a part of the teaching assistants perceives the importance of being qualified. We have gained this answer by analysing the teaching assistants' qualifications based on their level of education and teaching assistant training, as well as on their perception of their own qualifications. Teaching assistants with pedagogical backgrounds and additional brief trainings understand the importance of training. However, some students or teaching assistants who are graduates of social sciences (i.e. political science, philosophy, law) consider themselves well-qualified and believe they will gain the necessary knowledge through working directly as teaching assistants. The differences between schools are evident in regards to professional competences as well as the perception of personal competences. All focus groups and all schools emphasised empathy as personal competence. Some of the teaching assistants older than 35 chose to work as teaching assistants based on their experience with their own children and subsequently finished teaching assistant training. Teaching assistants especially value empathy and patience as personal competences, because they play a significant role in the context of their workplace. Unfortunately, they did not recognise some other crucial personal competences needed for the teaching assistant job, such as communication skills.

### ***Comparison of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' competences***

Tables 9 and 10 and figures 1 and 2 depict the comparison of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' personal and professional competences.

In order to compare the results of the teaching assistant focus group 3 (teaching assistants from three schools in a larger city) and three focus groups of teachers (FGT

3, FGT 4 and FGT 5), the three teacher groups were joined into a single focus group: teacher focus group 3.

Table 9

*Comparison of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' professional competences*

| Professional competences                  | FG 1     | FG 1                | FG 2       | FG 2                | FG 3<br>(FGT 3, 4, 5) | FG 3                |
|---|----------|---------------------|------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Participants                              | Teachers | Teaching Assistants | Teachers   | Teaching Assistants | Teachers              | Teaching Assistants |
| High school education                     |          | YES                 |            | YES                 |                       | YES                 |
| Student or graduate                       |          | YES                 |            |                     |                       | YES                 |
| College graduates or university graduates |          | YES                 |            | YES                 | <b>YES</b>            | <b>YES</b>          |
| Knowledge about special educational needs |          | YES                 |            |                     |                       |                     |
| Pedagogical background                    | YES      | NO <sup>2</sup>     | <b>YES</b> | <b>YES</b>          | <b>YES</b>            | <b>YES</b>          |
| Expertise/subject content                 |          |                     | YES        |                     | YES                   |                     |

Legend: NO<sup>2</sup>– completed 218 hours of training; FG – teacher focus group/ teaching assistant focus group; FG 3 Teachers – joint focus groups 3, 4 and 5; **YES** – congruence of necessary professional competences from the teachers and the teaching assistants' perspective

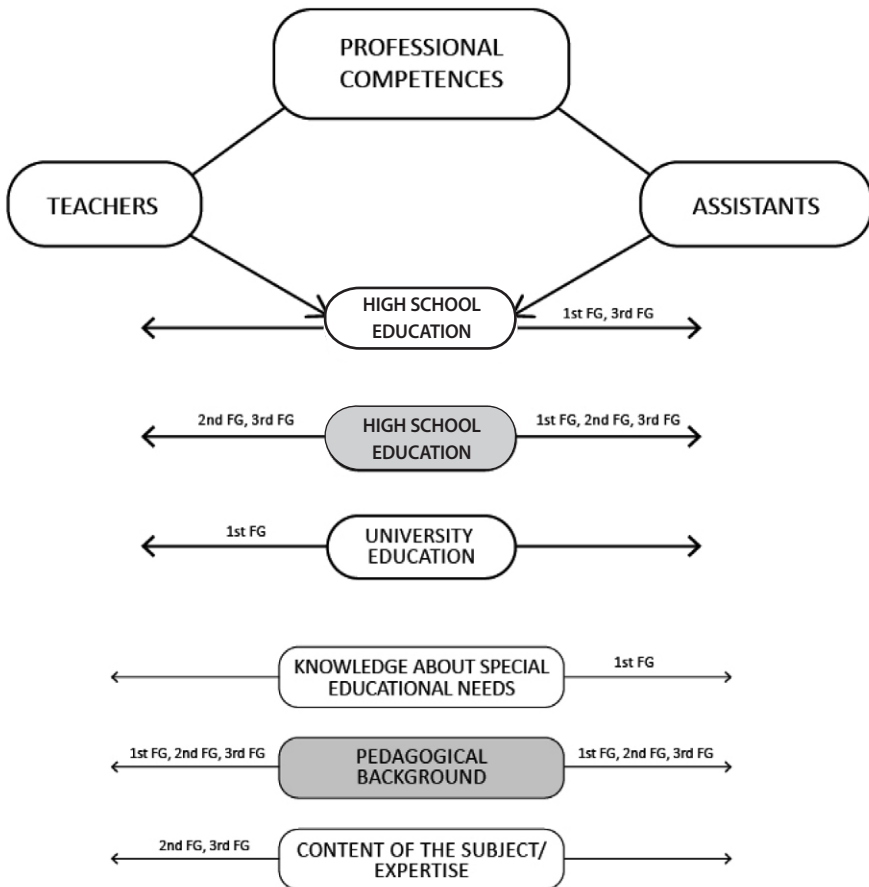
The following conclusions can be drawn by comparing the teachers and the teaching assistants' perspectives of professional competences (Table 9, Image 1):

In the focus group 1 that includes teaching assistants from a smaller town, teachers emphasize pedagogical background as the most important element of teaching assistants' professional competences. Teaching assistants from this focus group are either graduates in social sciences without pedagogical background or university/college students. Three teaching assistants have the basic 20-hour teaching assistant training, two do not have teaching assistant training, while only two have completed teaching assistant training with necessary pedagogical knowledge/skills, which means that there is a partial compatibility between their professional competences and the teachers' perspectives.

Teachers from the smaller town in focus group 2 name content knowledge and pedagogical background as the most important competences. Teaching assistants from the same focus group are class teachers and as such have pedagogical knowledge and their perspective is in line with those of the teachers. All teaching assistants have the basic 20-hour teaching assistant training and consider it important.

In the third teaching assistant focus group from a larger town and the joint third focus group of teachers whose priorities were expertise/subject content, pedagogical

background and higher education, partial congruity was noticeable in their perceptions of the professional competences. Teaching assistants were highly educated, but in various fields: some in social sciences (without pedagogical elements) and some in technical fields. In one school, i.e. one focus group, where the teachers considered pedagogical background the most important, teaching assistants were in training or have already finished it, so they had the necessary pedagogical background. In the focus group of teachers who emphasised expertise and content knowledge as the most important, teaching assistants came from the field of social sciences and had no training. Teaching assistants' opinions vary from considering training a priority (i.e. in the school where teachers stress pedagogical background) to perceiving the teaching assistants with background in social sciences and experience of direct work with children as sufficiently competent (in the focus group of teachers who emphasize content of the subject).



Legend: – Congruence of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' professional competences

Image 1: Comparison of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' professional competences

Table 10

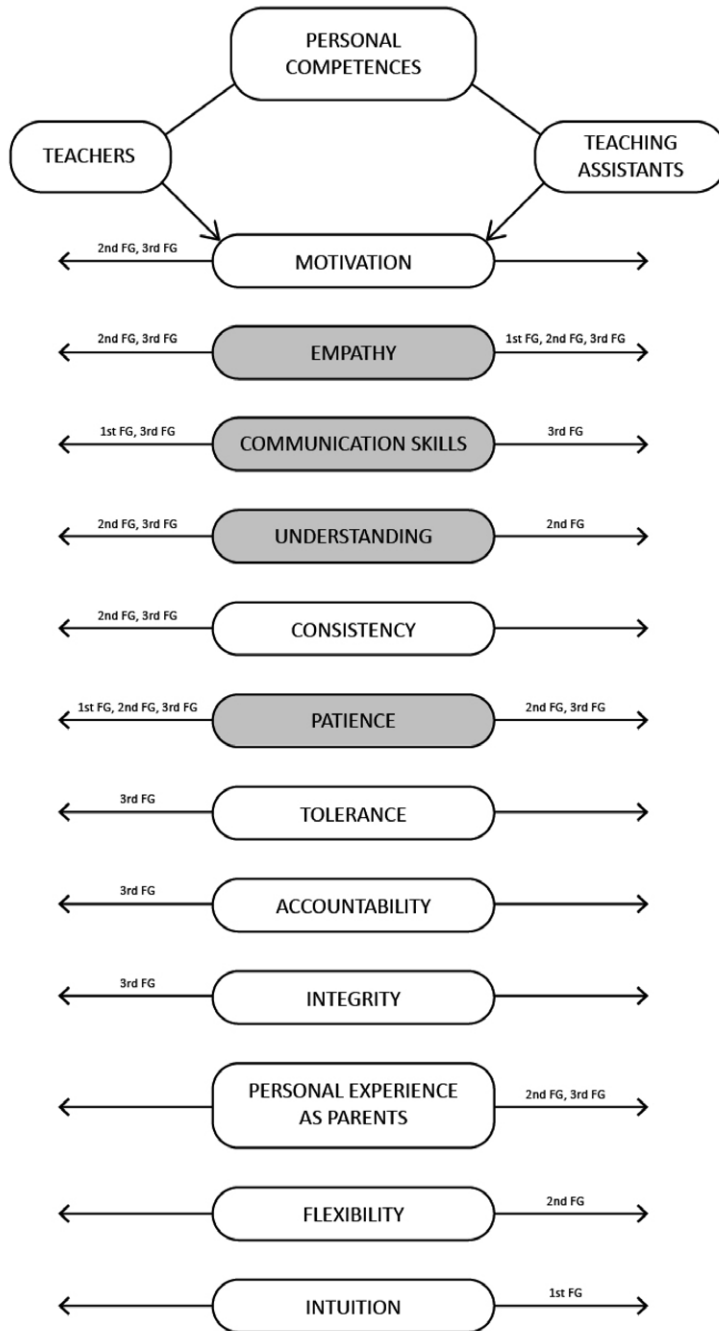
Comparison of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' personal competences

| Personal competences                      | FG 1             |                     | FG 2                   |                     | FG 3<br>(FGT 3, 4, 5) |                     |
|---|------------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|   | Teachers         | Teaching Assistants | Teachers               | Teaching Assistants | Teachers              | Teaching Assistants |
| Motivation/engagement                     |                  |                     | YES                    |                     | YES                   |                     |
| Empathy                                   |                  | YES                 | <b>YES</b>             | <b>YES</b>          | <b>YES</b>            | <b>YES</b>          |
| Communication skills/teamwork/cooperation | YES              |                     |                        |                     | <b>YES</b>            | <b>YES</b>          |
| Understanding                             |                  |                     | <b>YES</b>             | <b>YES</b>          | YES                   |                     |
| Consistency                               |                  |                     | YES                    |                     | YES                   |                     |
| Patience                                  | YES <sup>2</sup> |                     | <b>YES<sup>3</sup></b> | <b>YES</b>          | <b>YES</b>            | <b>YES</b>          |
| Tolerance                                 |                  |                     |                        |                     | YES                   |                     |
| Accountability                            |                  |                     |                        |                     | YES                   |                     |
| Integrity                                 |                  |                     |                        |                     | YES                   |                     |
| Personal experience as parents            |                  |                     |                        | YES                 |                       | YES                 |
| Flexibility                               |                  |                     |                        | YES                 |                       |                     |
| Intuition                                 |                  | YES                 |                        |                     |                       |                     |

Legend: YES<sup>2</sup> and YES<sup>3</sup> – priorities based exclusively on discussions in subgroups; FG 3 Teacher – joint FGT 3, 4 and 5; **YES** – congruence of necessary personal competences from the teachers and the teaching assistants' perspective

The following conclusions can be drawn based on the comparative analysis of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' personal competences (Table 10, Figure 2):

Teachers and teaching assistants both emphasise the importance of empathy and patience. Empathy was highlighted in all three focus groups including teaching assistants, as well as in teacher focus groups 2 and 3, while patience was highlighted in two teaching assistant focus groups (FG 2 and 3) and in the first, second and third teacher focus group. Communication skills are emphasised in the joint teacher focus group 1 and 3, whereas only in the third teaching assistant focus group. However, teaching assistants perceived neither motivation, consistency nor accountability as important. In two focus groups, teaching assistants highlighted parental personal experience as important, as well as flexibility and understanding, which have also been identified in separate teacher focus groups.




Legend:  – Congruence of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' personal competences

Image 2: Comparison of teachers and teaching assistants' perspectives of teaching assistants' personal competences

Partial compatibility between teachers and teaching assistants' perceptions of teaching assistants' competences emerged as the answer to the third research question. Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus among teachers in respect to their attitudes towards teaching assistants' competences. Their attitudes depend on context, teachers' experiences and schools they work at, as well as the practice of the school founders. Additionally, there is also a lack of compatibility of perspectives of teaching assistants' competences among schools and focus groups. However, it is important to warn that any incongruity between the teachers' and teaching assistants' perceptions of competences of teaching assistants, as closest partners in the education process, has adverse consequences for students with special educational needs as well as for the whole class.

## **Limits of generalisation**

There are some limitations to be aware of while generalising the results of this qualitative research. Firstly, participants are from three cities/towns in central Croatia and the schools were chosen accordingly. Considering the fact that the chosen schools received certain forms of support by the Inclusion Support Centre IDEM, it is possible that their perceptions of the competences were influenced by inclusive philosophy more than in other schools. Teachers emphasized pedagogical background as important for teaching assistants but also consider communication skills necessary for the interaction of teaching assistants with other students, as they often work with the rest of the class. It is possible that this approach differs in other schools, since the instructions of school founders varied regarding whether or not teaching assistants should work exclusively with one pupil with special educational needs or not. Furthermore, teachers who participated in the project had a more extensive experience of working with teaching assistants than teachers in other Croatian schools. In the past decade, the selection process for teaching assistants was very poorly defined and as such varied among schools and school founders. However, it is safe to assume that the application of the Regulation on Teaching Assistants and Communication Intermediaries (2018) will help to better harmonise teaching assistants' competences and to underline their importance, especially in terms of professional competences. A similar conclusion can be made about the employment process. Some of the teaching assistants who participated in our research were employed via employment contracts, while the rest were employed via temporary service contacts. Therefore, it is possible that the occupation will offer greater job security, that potential teaching assistants will view teaching assistants training as more important and there will be more properly qualified teaching assistants than indicated in our results.

Before 2001, most teaching assistant trainings in the United Kingdom were limited to introductory courses on the role of teaching assistants, similarly to Croatian basic 20-hour teaching assistant trainings, or they were designed solely to improve teaching assistants' confidence. Such trainings did not allow teaching assistants to gain competences, which led to dissatisfaction among teaching assistants, as highlighted



in some British research (Swann & Loxley, 1994; Blachford et al., 2009). Thus, we assume that, once the occupation of teaching assistant is legally regulated in Croatia, repeated research will show more favourable results regarding this form of support for educational inclusion.

## **Conclusions and suggestions**

Ten years after teaching assistants were initially introduced into mainstream schools, it has become evident – due to unequal practice of using teaching assistants not only in various parts of Croatia but also within a single city - that the practice needs to be equalised. The only way to ensure that pupils with special educational needs can access all their rights equally is through legislation that will explain, among other things, the role of teaching assistants as well as their cooperation with teachers and enable teaching assistance to become a new occupation in Croatia. Analysis of teaching assistant trainees' satisfaction conducted in the UK after professional standards and necessary competences were established indicated that almost two thirds of trainees were satisfied with their training and options regarding professional development. Based on the research results presented in this paper, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1 Teachers expect teaching assistants to have pedagogical background as well as specific knowledge about the content of subjects. They prefer highly educated teaching assistants, which partially coincides with the currently employed teaching assistants' competences. However, precisely highly educated teaching assistants are the ones that consider their jobs as teaching assistants only a temporary career solution intended to bridge them over until they find a job more suited to their qualifications. This means they usually only work as teaching assistants for a few months or, most commonly, a year. Therefore, such teaching assistants are the least economical and the least appropriate choice for schools and pupils. Constantly changing teaching assistants is not a good solution because it requires a time-consuming period of adaptation after introducing a new person to the position.
- 2 Teachers emphasised teaching assistants' empathy and patience as important competences. This is congruent with the teaching assistants' opinions. Teachers also value teaching assistants' communication skills, i.e. their readiness to cooperate, which does not correspond with the teaching assistants' perspective. Neither teachers nor teaching assistants consider accountability and consistency to be priority competences.
- 3 Teaching assistants over the age of 35 with completed teaching assistant training wish to work as teaching assistants permanently. Being a teaching assistant is their choice of career – a finding that is also supported by international research results (Vincent et al., 2005).
- 4 Teaching assistants need to be fully prepared for their role in class. It is also necessary to start using evidence-based interventions to support teaching assistants' efforts in individual teaching and teaching of smaller groups (as indicated by the most recent global research, i.e. Bakopoulou (2018).

Hence, suggestions for improving education policy concerning the role of teaching assistants in inclusive education are as follows:

- 1 During the selection process, it is necessary to account for the teaching assistant's willingness to remain employed as a teaching assistant for a longer period of time;
- 2 The teaching assistant needs to be fully qualified for the position, including all necessary personal and professional competences;
- 3 Teachers need to be systematically educated about the role of teaching assistants;
- 4 Legislation is necessary that will define the national occupation standard for teaching assistants, its qualification framework and therefore teaching assistant training programmes;
- 5 Quality teamwork that will include fulfilling the needs of teaching assistants through good school organisation and properly prepared teachers.

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# Usporedba perspektiva učitelja i pomoćnika u nastavi o potrebnim kompetencijama za poslove pomoćnika u nastavi

## Sažetak

Ovo je istraživanje dio projekta „Uloga pomoćnika u nastavi iz perspektive nastavnika i pomoćnika u nastavi” koji su proveli Učilište za obrazovanje odraslih IDEM i Centar inkluzivne potpore IDEM. Cilj ovoga istraživanja bio je utvrditi kompetencije pomoćnika u nastavi iz perspektive ove dvije skupine djelatnika u školama i analizirati ih u skladu s inkluzivnim pristupom odgoju i obrazovanju. U tu svrhu provedeno je kvalitativno istraživanje primjenom intervjua s fokusnim grupama sa 69 sudionika (40 učitelja i 29 pomoćnika u nastavi) u osnovnim školama tri grada u Hrvatskoj. Transkribirani materijal intervjua s fokusnim grupama, podatci općih upitnika i školska dokumentacija čine empirijsku građu za kvalitativnu analizu podataka. Za dublji uvid u perspektive učitelja i pomoćnika u nastavi o potrebnim kompetencijama pomoćnika primijenjena je analiza unaprijed definiranih okvira ili tema. Utvrđeno je da se perspektive učitelja i pomoćnika samo u jednom dijelu podudaraju i to više u odnosu na osobne nego profesionalne kompetencije potrebne za rad pomoćnika. Činjenica je da se radi o učiteljima i pomoćnicima u nastavi, neposrednim suradnicima u procesu poučavanja, koji trebaju imati jasnu sliku što je uloga pomoćnika i koje su im potrebne, kako profesionalne, tako i osobne kompetencije za rad u inkluzivnom razredu. Očekuje se da će se prilikom zakonskoga reguliranja zanimanja pomoćnik u nastavi i organizacije rada u školi, voditi računa o nalazima ovoga istraživanja provedenoga nakon što su pomoćnici već više od 10 godina prisutni u hrvatskoj odgojno-obrazovnoj praksi.

**Ključne riječi:** inkluzivno obrazovanje; kompetencije pomoćnika u nastavi; kvalitativno istraživanje.

## Uvod

Realizacija prava na obrazovanje učenika s posebnim potrebama veliki je izazov obrazovnim politikama, kako u svijetu tako i u Hrvatskoj. Zato su se u svijetu, posebno nakon što je usvojen Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) i razvili sustavi potpore za podizanje razine pristupačnosti škole.

U Hrvatskoj se već dvadesetak godina provode istraživanja s ciljem pronalaženja učinkovitih mehanizama za ostvarenje inkluzije. Istovremeno su se u hrvatske nacionalne strategije i programe za djecu s teškoćama (Nacionalna strategija za izjednačavanje mogućnosti za osobe s invaliditetom, 2007; Nacionalni plan aktivnosti za prava i interese djece, 2006) uveli sustavi potpore inkluzivnom obrazovanju. Pravilnikom o osnovnoškolskom i srednjoškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju učenika s teškoćama u razvoju (2015) stekli su se normativni uvjeti za neke od ključnih oblika podrške: stručni tim kao mobilna multidisciplinarna služba potpore, centri potpore, koordinator škole za posebne potrebe i pomoćnik u nastavi.

Hrvatsko školstvo ima najviše iskustva s uvođenjem pomoćnika u nastavi kao oblikom podrške inkluzivnom obrazovanju. Broj pomoćnika progresivno je rastao, pa tako od 209 pomoćnika u školskoj godini 2009./2010., u 2018./2019. bilježimo više od 3500 pomoćnika u nastavi, kada je napokon donesen i Pravilnik o pomoćnicima u nastavi i komunikacijskim posrednicima (2018). Tijekom procesa uvođenja pomoćnika u nastavi koristila su se iskustva drugih država s razvijenim inkluzivnim obrazovanjem. Sukladno tomu, i njihova je uloga usmjerena doprinosu ostvarenja prava na obrazovanje u školi i razredu zajedno s vršnjacima.

Dosadašnja svjetska istraživanja pretežno su se bavila pitanjem inkluzivne uloge pomoćnika u nastavi i potrebnim kompetencijama za to zanimanje. Tako su autori Vincent, Cremin i Thomas (2005) utvrdili da se u praksi davala veća važnost osobnim kompetencijama pomoćnika, primjerice strpljivosti, smislu za humor, sklonosti timskom radu i razumijevanju učenika, nego profesionalnim kompetencijama i osposobljenosti. Jedna velika metastudija (EPPI Review, 2003; Cajkler, W., Tennant, G., Tiknaz, Y., Sage R., Tucker, S. i Taylor, C., 2007) u cilju rasvjetljavanja te nedovoljno istražene teme, analizirala je ulogu profesionalnoga osposobljavanja pomoćnika u nastavi i čimbenike važne za politiku obrazovanja u odnosu na ulogu pomoćnika u nastavi. Rezultati su ukazali na problem privremenosti zaposlenja, niske plaće pomoćnika, opasnost od izolacije učenika s pomoćnikom u razredu, osposobljavanje za pomoćnika. U longitudinalnom istraživanju autora Blatchford, Russell, Bassett, Brown i Martin (2007) istaklo se prisutnost raznih vrsta podrške u školama koje pružaju pomoćnici u nastavi, od specijalističkih (ICT) do općih. Nadalje, oni su kao i autori Giangreco, M. F. i Doyle, M. B. (2007) utvrdili važnost pedagoške uloge pomoćnika u odgojno-obrazovnom procesu koja doprinosi inkluzivnoj ulozi pomoćnika u nastavi.

Već su 2001. godine u Velikoj Britaniji doneseni nacionalni standardi zanimanja pomoćnik u nastavi (National Occupational Standards, Level 2 i 3), a standardi iz 2003., NVQ 3 omogućuju napredovanje u zanimanju na višu razinu, *Higher Level Teaching Assitants* (Watkinson, 2008). Tako su nastali programi osposobljavanja za početnike NVQ Level 2 i 3 (Bentham i Hutchins, 2008) te viši za one koji žele napredovati u profesiji (HLTA, 2006). Od 2015. u toj su zemlji na snazi profesionalni standardi za pomoćnike u nastavi (Professional standards for teaching assistants, 2016). Također su za sve djelatnike škola, a uz podršku znanstvenika i stručnjaka sa

sveučilišta i iz prakse, izrađene upute o primjeni standarda koje je izdalo nekoliko nacionalnih organizacija (UNISON, NAHT-National Association of Head Teachers, NE - National Education Trust, London Leadership Strategy and Maximising TAs). Time je definirano da pomoćnik u nastavi predstavlja sve podrške u razredu koje se odnose na učenje i podršku učeniku te da se pomoćnici trebaju zapošljavati u školama, a samo iznimno neki mogu djelovati i kao servis lokalne uprave za škole u zajednici. Osnovna je zadaća, prema tim standardima, prikladan pristup poučavanju i učenju uz korištenje prilagođene strategije te pomoć učitelju i svim učenicima, uključujući učenike s posebnim edukacijskim potrebama. Isto je tako naglašena uloga pomoćnika u promoviranju i poticanju inkluzije. Pomoćnici niže i više razine kompetencija razlikuju se po razini odgovornosti.

Na važnost pedagoške uloge pomoćnika ukazala su i novija istraživanja (Bowles, Radford, i Bakopoulou, 2018), koja su se bavila strategijama poučavanja, zasnovanima na samoaktivnosti učenika.

U Hrvatskoj su sa samim uvođenjem pomoćnika u nastavi od 2005. godine nastali i prvi neformalni programi edukacije koje je provodio Centar inkluzivne potpore IDEM. Godine 2012. Agencija za strukovno obrazovanje i obrazovanje odraslih (temeljem prijedloga grupe istaknutih inkluzivnih stručnjaka Učilišta za obrazovanje odraslih IDEM) odobrila je Plan i program osposobljavanja za poslove pomoćnika u nastavi, pa je Učilištu IDEM Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja odobrilo provođenje toga prvog programa za osposobljavanje pomoćnika u nastavi. U hrvatskoj se praksi nastoji podići razina osposobljenosti pomoćnika u nastavi i putem ESF projekata kratkim informativnim edukacijama i publiciranjem priručnika za pomoćnike na županijskim razinama (Velki i Romstein, 2014).

Danas je uloga pomoćnika u nastavi u hrvatskoj praksi ne samo raznolika, nego su se tijekom vremena usvojile neke aktivnosti pomoćnika, koje umjesto da pridonese osjećaju učenika da je od vršnjaka u razredu prihvaćen, doprinose njegovoj izolaciji. Premda je u Hrvatskoj prvo kvalitativno istraživanje o ulozi pomoćnika u nastavi provedeno još tijekom 2007./2008. godine u sklopu međunarodnoga projekta *Development towards the Inclusive School: Practices – Research – Capacity Building* (Igrić i Cvitković, 2013), do danas ih je provedeno tek nekoliko, i to samo kvantitativnih istraživanja.

Kako bismo dobili znanstveno utemeljen odgovor na pitanje tko su danas u Hrvatskoj pomoćnici u školama, kakve kompetencije od njih očekuju učitelji – njihovi neposredni suradnici, koje poslove oni obavljaju i tko im u tome pomaže, proveden je jednogodišnji projekt „Uloga pomoćnika u nastavi iz perspektive učitelja i pomoćnika” (nositelji: CIP IDEM i Učilište za obrazovanje odraslih IDEM).

U okviru projekta utvrđeno je da pomoćnici u nastavi percipiraju svoje zanimanje kao privremeno, a posao pomoćnika obavljaju u međuvremenu dok ne nađu posao u skladu sa svojom naobrazbom. Oni su mahom različitih zanimanja: od ekonomista do profesora i inženjera. Zadržavaju se često manje od jedne školske godine na tom poslu, što se loše odražava na kvalitetu podrške učenicima (ponovna adaptacija učenika na

novoga pomoćnika, upućivanje nove osobe u način rada s učenicima i na suradnju s učiteljima, stručnom službom i roditeljima). Rezultati projekta o ulozi pomoćnika u nastavi, danas nakon 10 godina od njihova uvođenja u škole, ukazuju da su njihove najvažnije uloge iz perspektive učitelja i pomoćnika u nastavi u podršci u učenju, podršci u ponašanju i aktivnosti pomoćnika s drugim učenicima (Matejčić i Bambir, 2018)

Budući da je u Hrvatskoj u tijeku proces donošenja Standarda zanimanja i Standarda kvalifikacija za zanimanje pomoćnik u nastavi, važno je dobiti uvid i u kompetencije koje odgovaraju za poslove pomoćnika u nastavi na temelju percepcije učitelja s iskustvom suradnje s pomoćnicima. Isto je tako potrebno uvidjeti u kojoj je mjeri dosadašnja praksa u izboru pomoćnika u skladu s potrebama učitelja i inkluzivnim obrazovanjem, kao i koje se kompetencije trebaju osigurati programima osposobljavanja za zanimanje pomoćnik u nastavi

## **Cilj istraživanja i istraživačka pitanja**

Cilj ovoga istraživanja bio je utvrditi kompetencije pomoćnika u nastavi i analizirati ih u skladu s inkluzivnim pristupom odgoju i obrazovanju, kojim se ostvaruje pravo djece s teškoćama na obrazovanje zajedno s vršnjacima. Opisat ćemo kompetencije pomoćnika za koje učitelji smatraju da su potrebne u redovnoj osnovnoj školi te utvrditi koje kompetencije imaju pomoćnici i kako ih percipiraju.

Stoga su postavljena sljedeća istraživačka pitanja:

1. Kako učitelji percipiraju kompetencije pomoćnika u nastavi za rad u redovnoj osnovnoj školi?
2. Kako pomoćnici u nastavi percipiraju kompetencije za poslove pomoćnika u nastavi koje sada obavljaju?
3. Kako se podudaraju kompetencije za poslove pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja s kompetencijama pomoćnika u nastavi i njihovom percepcijom kompetencija?

## **Metode istraživanja**

### ***Sudionici i postupak istraživanja***

Istraživanjem je obuhvaćeno sedam osnovnih škola iz tri grada u Hrvatskoj, s gotovo 5000 učenika, od kojih je 341 učenik s teškoćama. U odabiru škola rukovodilo se:

- dosadašnjom suradnjom nositelja istraživanja sa školama u uvođenju pomoćnika u nastavi kroz 20-satne edukacije pomoćnika i povremene supervizije koordinatora u školama i pomoćnika u nastavi
- dužinom iskustva škola u uvođenju pomoćnika u nastavi
- brojem pomoćnika u školi (najmanje pet).

Nažalost, neke od škola s velikim iskustvom u uvođenju pomoćnika i suradnjom CIP IDEM-a s koordinatorima i učiteljima, nisu odgovarale kriteriju od najmanje pet zaposlenih pomoćnika u nastavi.

U suradnji s koordinatorima škola provedeno je ispitivanje Općim upitnikom za učitelje i Općim upitnikom za pomoćnike u nastavi koji pružaju podatke o nekim



obilježjima učitelja, odnosno pomoćnika u nastavi te o školskom ozračju. Upitnike su ispunili 81 učitelj i 48 pomoćnika. Dobivene informacije poslužile su pri selekciji učitelja za kvalitativni dio istraživanja, kao i za triangulaciju s podacima intervjua s fokusnim grupama radi povećanja objektivnosti istraživanja.

U kvalitativnom dijelu istraživanja sudjelovalo je ukupno 69 sudionika: 40 učitelja i 29 pomoćnika u nastavi. Izbor učitelja, kako rekosmo, proveden je temeljem podataka dobivenih uz pomoć Općeg upitnika za učitelje, primijenjenoga na sve učitelje spremne na sudjelovanje u projektu, pri čemu smo vodili računa o zastupljenosti nekih njihovih obilježja u određenoj školi (godine staža, dužina iskustva s pomoćnicima, razredna ili predmetna nastava, predmet koji predaje). Većina učitelja (29) imala je više od 10 godina radnoga staža u školi. Omjer učitelja razredne i učitelja predmetne nastave bio je 20 : 20. Sudionike istraživanja – pomoćnike u nastavi, činili su svi dostupni pomoćnici za sudjelovanje u intervjuu s fokusnim grupama iz istih škola iz kojih su bili i učitelji. Najveći broj pomoćnika bio je u dobi od 27 do 34 godine (16), s time da je približno bio jednak broj mlađih od 26 i starijih od 45.

Intervjui s fokusnim grupama održavani su u školama uključenima u projekt. U dva manja grada, gdje su manje udaljenosti između škola, u jednoj je školi održan jedan intervju s fokusnom grupom s pomoćnicima za obje škole, a u drugoj jedan intervju s fokusnom grupom s učiteljima tih dviju škola. U većem gradu, zbog udaljenosti između škola i kako bi osigurali dolazak svih ispitanika, provedene su tri fokusne grupe učitelja, u svakoj školi po jedna fokusna grupa za učitelje dotične škole. Svi dostupni pomoćnici iste tri škole činili su jednu fokusnu grupu pomoćnika u nastavi i bili su intervjuirani u prostorijama CIP IDEM-a, koji je približno jednako udaljen od sve tri škole.

Grupa je imala sedam do deset sudionika. Intervjui s fokusnim grupama vođeni su prema polustrukturiranim intervjuiima s fokusnim grupama za učitelje, odnosno pomoćnike u nastavi. Trajanje intervjua s fokusnom grupom bilo je 90 minuta.

Tematske cjeline intervjua za učitelje obuhvaćale su: iskustvo učitelja u školi i radu s pomoćnicima, opis rada pomoćnika, suradnja s pomoćnikom i stručnjacima za djecu s teškoćama, odnos pomoćnika i drugih učenika, odnos pomoćnika s roditeljima, potrebna znanja, osobine i vještine pomoćnika. Budući da je uvriježeno mišljenje da učitelji razredne nastave imaju drugačije preferencije u kompetencijama od učitelja predmetne nastave, tijekom intervjua s fokusnom grupom dvadesetak minuta se odvojilo za grupnu diskusiju u dvije podskupine, posebno učitelji razredne i posebno učitelji predmetne nastave. Svaka podskupina upisivala je na veliki papir kompetencije koje bi po njihovu mišljenje trebali imati pomoćnici i rangirala prvih 10. Na fokusnoj grupi svi su zajedno raspravljali o sličnostima i razlikama prioriternih kompetencija između učitelja razredne i predmetne nastave.

Tematske cjeline za pomoćnike u nastavi obuhvaćale su: osposobljenost pomoćnika za rad, suradnja s učiteljima, koordinatore i roditeljima, opis rada u razredu, potrebna znanja, vještine i osobine pomoćnika te perspektiva zanimanja.

Intervjue s fokusnom grupom vodila je autorica ovoga rada zajedno s jednom od suradnica na projektu. Voditeljica grupnih intervjua iskusan je grupni terapeut i

supervizor, čime se osigurala atmosfera povjerenja sudionika u dijeljenju mišljenja i osjećaja. Svi su sudionici dragovoljno sudjelovali u istraživanju. Suradnice, stručnjakinje edukacijske rehabilitacije, za vrijeme provedbe intervjua s fokusnom grupom bilježile su neverbalnu komunikaciju i važne prekretnice. Intervjui s fokusnim grupama zabilježeni su i audiozapisom. Pri svemu se vodilo računa o tajnosti i anonimnosti podataka istraživanja, a u transkripciji materijala ne otkriva se identitet pojedine osobe jer su izjave bilježene kodovima–brojevima.

### **Metode obrade podataka**

Podatci općih upitnika uneseni su Excel tablice i u NVivo11 program, a sumarni podatci za svaku varijablu su distribuirani u razrede. Transkribirani materijal intervjua s fokusnom grupom, podatci općih upitnika i školska dokumentacija čine empirijsku građu za kvalitativnu analizu podataka. Analizu građe uvijek su zajedno provodila dva istraživača u konzultaciji s trećim, što uz triangulaciju podataka i metoda osigurava veću vjerodostojnost istraživanja.

U svrhu dubljega uvida u područja iz perspektive učitelja i pomoćnika u nastavi, sudionika ovoga istraživanja, ovdje je odabrana analiza unaprijed definiranih okvira ili tema. (Ritchie i Spencer, 1994). Ta se analiza često koristi kod primijenjenih istraživanja u području socijalnih politika, kada je cilj istraživanja doći do informacija potrebnih određenim institucijama zaduženima za provedbu politika (Pope, Ziebland, i Mays, 2000). U ovom je slučaju riječ o istraživanju čiji će se nalazi moći koristiti u donošenju standarda novoga zanimanja i standarda kvalifikacije pomoćnika u nastavi koje provode Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja te Ministarstvo rada i mirovinskog sustava Republike Hrvatske u okviru inkluzivne politike obrazovanja (Strategija znanosti, obrazovanja i tehnologije, 2014).

Glavne teme istraživačkoga projekta „Uloga pomoćnika u nastavi iz perspektive nastavnika i pomoćnika u nastavi” predstavljaju početne okvire za kvalitativno prikupljanje (istraživačka pitanja i pitanja u intervjuima s fokusnim grupama) te analizu podataka.

Za učitelje obuhvaćena su sljedeća tematska područja:

1. Iskustvo učitelja u radu s učenicima s teškoćama i pomoćnicima u nastavi
2. Percepcija učitelja o učeniku
3. Percepcija učitelja o pomoćniku u odnosu na poslove i kompetencije pomoćnika
4. Suradnja pomoćnika
5. Suradnja učitelja

Tematska područja za pomoćnika u nastavi su:

1. Iskustvo i osposobljenost pomoćnika u nastavi za rad
2. Percepcija pomoćnika o učeniku s teškoćama
3. Poslovi pomoćnika
4. Suradnja pomoćnika
5. Perspektiva zanimanja pomoćnika
6. Odnos pomoćnika s drugim učenicima

Početne teme rezultat su znanja i iskustva drugih država u provođenju politike inkluzivnoga obrazovanja, istraživanja u svijetu i desetogodišnje prakse u Hrvatskoj o ulozi pomoćnika u nastavi te tema proizašlih tijekom intervjua sa sudionicima. Teme odabrane za analizu u ovom su radu:

1. *Kompetencije za poslove pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja*, tematsko područje: Percepcija učitelja o pomoćniku u odnosu na poslove i kompetencije pomoćnika
2. *Kompetencije za poslove pomoćnika iz perspektive pomoćnika*, tematsko područje: Iskustvo i osposobljenost pomoćnika u nastavi za rad

Iako se u ovom pristupu odražavaju originalna opažanja i refleksije istraživača koji provode prikupljanje podataka, podatci su više strukturirani, a analiza podataka je jednostavnija (Pope i sur., 2000; Lacey i Luff, 2007) nego u nekim drugim kvalitativnim analizama podataka. Ta metoda dopušta i identifikaciju novih tema koje nisu bile postavljene u polaznom okviru analize. Svi su audiozapisi transkribirani, nakon čega se prišlo njihovom strukturiranju. Jedinica analize bila je izjava sudionika, dio ili cijela rečenica u skladu s postavljenim istraživačkim pitanjima. Konkretni koraci kvalitativne analize okvira korišteni u ovom istraživanju su sljedeći:

1. upoznavanje s građom i uređivanje empirijske građe, čitanje transkripata i izdvajanje bitnih izjava
2. identifikacija tematskoga okvira — identificiranje svih ključnih pitanja, koncepata i tema; pritom su se istraživači oslanjali na pitanja koja proizlaze iz ciljeva istraživanja, kao i pitanja koja su postavili sami sudionici
3. parafraziranje zapisa svih odgovora sudionika koji se odnose na kompetencije pomoćnika u nastavi
4. kodiranje izdvojenih izjava s obzirom na teme – kodovi I. reda
5. svrstavanje kodova I. reda u kodove II. reda / kategorije:
  - a) profesionalne kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja
  - b) osobne kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja
  - c) profesionalne kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive pomoćnika
  - d) osobne kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive pomoćnika
6. interpretacija nalaza istraživanja prema temama Kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja i Kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive pomoćnika.

## **Rezultati i rasprava**

### ***Kompetencije za poslove pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja***

Budući da su učitelji prvi neposredni suradnici pomoćnika u nastavi jer zajedno djeluju u razredu, učiteljima je važna učinkovitost međusobne suradnje. Za uspjeh podrške učeniku s teškoćama i inkluzivno ozračje u razredu neophodna je dobra suradnja učitelja i pomoćnika u nastavi. Kako bi se ona ostvarila, potrebno je znati koje kompetencije učitelji smatraju nužnima kod suradnika, pomoćnika u nastavi.

Stoga će se u ovom radu iz tematskoga područja Percepcija učitelja o pomoćniku u odnosu na poslove i kompetencije pomoćnika, analizirati tema *Kompetencije za*

*poslove pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja*. Temeljem analize i interpretacije prikupljenih podataka u pet intervjuja s fokusnim grupama s učiteljima, Općim upitnikom za učitelje i iz dokumentacije škole, utvrđene su kategorije profesionalne kompetencije i osobne kompetencije pomoćnika (Tablica 1.). U rezultatima, koje slijede, navode se kodovi (brojevi) svakog sudionika.

Tablica 1.

### **Profesionalne kompetencije**

U tablicama 2. i 3. prikazani su podatci za kategoriju Profesionalne kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja.

Tablica 2.

Tablica 3.

U Tablici 2 vidljivo je da u četiri od pet fokusnih grupa učitelji u intervjuima s fokusnim grupama ističu pedagoška znanja kao potrebnu kompetenciju pomoćnika. U intervjuu s fokusnom grupom za pedagoška znanja pretežito su se opredjeljivali učitelji razredne nastave s dužim stažem u nastavi i s višegodišnjim iskustvom rada s pomoćnicima. Neki smatraju da pomoćnicima trebaju pedagoška znanja, ali ne moraju uvijek biti i VSS. Tako jedan učitelj predmetne nastave u četvrtoj fokusnoj grupi ističe: „Pomoćnik treba imati pedagošku struku, kako bi obrazovne i odgojne metode mogao primijeniti u radu s učenikom i cijelim razredom” (1204). Kada su učitelji razredne i predmetne nastave raspravljali podijeljeni u podgrupe prema zanimanju (Tablica 3.) i rangirali kompetencije po važnosti, učitelji predmetne nastave iz tri fokusne grupe dodijelili su pedagoškoj struci 2. mjesto, a u jednoj su se podudarali učitelji razredne i predmetne nastave u visokom vrednovanju pedagoških znanja. Znanje o teškoćama učenika kao prioritetna kompetencija pojavljuje se samo u jednoj fokus grupi, i to kod učitelja predmetne nastave.

U intervjuu s fokusnom grupom, u tri grupe se ističe stručnost pomoćnika u poznavanju sadržaja predmeta kao važna kompetencija, što ilustrira mišljenje učitelja: „Učenik ponekad treba pomoć samo u učenju, pa u situaciji kada asistent ne razumije gradivo, onda učiteljica ne može objašnjavati asistentu kako bi on gradivo prenio učeniku” (1223). I u tri fokusne grupe nakon rasprave u podgrupama, visoko se rangirala stručnost, od 1. do 3. mjesta. Takva se uloga stručnosti, temeljem analize konteksta, može povezati s iskustvom učitelja koji su i sami bili pomoćnici tijekom pripravničkog staža, ili su imali dobro iskustvo s pripravnikom - pomoćnikom. Slična je perspektiva i učitelja razredne i predmetne nastave. Pri tome bi učiteljima razredne nastave odgovarao pripravnik razredne nastave, a učiteljima predmetne nastave pomoćnik učitelj predmetne nastave, ili diploma studija iz humanističkoga područja. Iskustva s pomoćnicima sudionici istraživanja imali su od jedne do 12 godina. U raspravama učitelja podijeljenih u grupe prema zanimanju (Tablica 3) nije se pojavljivala visoka

naobrazba kao poželjna kompetencija. Međutim, ona je istaknuta prilikom intervjua cijele fokusne grupe (Tablica 1), i to u dvije fokusne grupe, u kojima učitelji navode „Asistenti s višom naobrazbom imali su bolji uvid što mogu postići u radu” (3219); „Takvi su pomoćnici uporniji” (3222).

Zanimljivo je da je samo dio učitelja u u intervjuiima s fokusnim grupama isticao potrebu profesionalne kompetentnosti pomoćnika, i to neovisno o njihovom radnom stažu i dužini iskustva s pomoćnicima. Opredjeljenje za određeni aspekt profesionalne kompetentnosti može se povezati s praksom određene škole, odnosno načinom izbora pomoćnika (preferiranje učitelja na osposobljavanju u funkciji pomoćnika).

### **Osobne kompetencije**

Iz tablica 4. i 5. vidljivo je da se u fokusnim grupama učitelja ističe devet osobnih kompetencija pomoćnika.

Tablica 4.

Tablica 5.

Učitelji smatraju da je važna motiviranost pomoćnika u nastavi: „Asistent mora željeti raditi taj posao” (4224). Tu kompetenciju iz skupine motivacijskih kompetencija pokušavaju definirati kao usredotočenost, zainteresiranost, „prisutan mislima”, da želi raditi i uspjeti. Zanimljivo je da učitelji razredne nastave vide motiviranost pomoćnika kao ljubav prema djeci i organiziranost, a predmetni učitelji povezuju motiviranost s angažiranošću pomoćnika. U jednoj fokusnoj grupi tijekom intervjua nitko nije spomenuo motiviranost / angažiranost niti je bila među osam prioritetnih kompetencija. U tri fokusne grupe kod predmetnih učitelja ta je osobna kompetencija zauzela od 1. do 6. mjesta, s time da je u jednoj grupi rangirana motiviranost kao angažiranost na 1. mjesto, a u drugoj fokus grupi je na 2. mjestu po važnosti, i to poimana kao želja za uspjehom i radom. U dvije fokusne grupe slično su je rangirali i učitelji predmetne i učitelji razredne nastave (3. i 4. mjesto).

Empatija se javlja u fokus grupnim intervjuiima u tri od pet fokus grupa (Tablica 4). Učitelji je povezuju s razumijevanjem učenika i koriste pojmove: ljubav prema djeci, toplina, suosjećajnost. Primjerice, „Empatija znači ljubav prema djetetu i uključuje strpljenje i puno snage” (2211). Ta je socijalno-emocionalna kompetencija važna učiteljima koji imaju između pet i 32 godine radnoga staža, a iskustvo s pomoćnikom najmanje tri godine, ili su i sami bili pomoćnici. U raspravama po podgrupama učitelja razredne i predmetne nastave (Tablica 5) empatija je uvrštena među prvih pet prioriteta u svih pet fokusnih grupa, a u četiri fokusne grupe zajednička je (iako različito rangirana) i jednim i drugim učiteljima. U jednoj fokusnoj grupi je čak prva po važnosti za obje skupine učitelja. Ne može se reći da je uvijek važnija u razrednoj nastavi jer su joj u jednoj fokusnoj grupi upravo učitelji predmetne nastave pridali najveću važnost. U raspravi po podgrupama učitelji su povezivali empatiju s pomaganjem djetetu i dobrotom pomoćnika.

Komunikacijske vještine / Timski rad i suradnju učitelji vrednuju izjavama kao: „Komunikacija je važnija od konkretnog znanja” (7244, predmetna učiteljica s 24 godine staža i devet godina iskustva s pomoćnikom) ili „Spremnost pomoćnika na razgovor sa stručnjakom i da zna saslušati” (1203, predmetna učiteljica s iskustvom s 26 godina rada u školi i šest godina suradnje s pomoćnicima). Učitelji povezuju komunikacijske vještine pomoćnika s njegovom sklonošću timskom radu i suradnji, prvenstveno s učiteljem i s roditeljima. Za tu kompetenciju opredjeljivali su se učitelji sa stažem od šest do 41 godinu, a pomoćnika su imali najmanje tri godine, pa sve do 12 godina. U svih se pet fokusnih grupa ta kompetencija javlja među prvih osam, što je zajedničko objema skupinama učitelja, ali s različitim razinom važnosti.

Razumijevanje učenika, u sudionika intervjua s fokusnim grupama, podrazumijeva suosjećajnost, prihvaćanje teškoća i toleriranje ponašanja, kao i iznalaženje načina suradnje s učenikom. Ta kompetencija pomoćnika nije prioritetna ni u jednoj fokusnoj grupi učitelja. Javlja se kod obje skupine učitelja sa stažem većim od pet godina (škole većega grada). Međutim, riječ je o vrlo važnoj kompetenciji, koja indicira da pomoćnik poznaje učenika, razumije njegovo ponašanje i sposobnosti za učenje, a znade prikladan način poučavanja.

Dosljednost su posebno istakli sudionici jedne fokusne grupe iz iste škole, i to učitelji razredne nastave: „Pomoćnik ne smije biti sluga učeniku, mora biti dosljedan u radu, ne ići linijom manjeg otpora; Mora se držati dogovorenih pravila i postavljenih granica” (1208). Riječ je o učiteljima sa stažem između 13 i 28 godina. Razumljivo je da upravo učitelji razredne nastave ističu tu kompetenciju, jer je ona jedan od ključnih pristupa odgoju djece, među ostalim i u stjecanju radnih navika na početku školovanja sve djece, pa tako i djece s teškoćama.

Strpljenje smatra vrlo važnim ista ona fokusna grupa koja podržava važnost dosljednosti i razumijevanja: „Pomoćnik treba imati strpljenja, jer treba više puta ponavljati” (1201). Tu osobnu kompetenciju podjednako ističu i razredni i predmetni učitelji, što potvrđuju rezultati rangiranja. Za nju se opredjeljuju sudionici sa stažem od sedam do 26 godina i iskustvom u suradnji s pomoćnicima četiri do osam godina. Četiri fokusne grupe strpljenje su rangirale od 1. do 5. mjesta. U tri fokusne grupe ono je zajedničko razrednim i predmetnim učiteljima, a u dvije fokusne grupe je čak na prvom mjestu. U dvije grupe razrednih učitelja na prvom je mjestu, a u tri grupe zajednička je i razrednim i predmetnim nastavnicima. Što znači ova kompetencija? Ona ukazuje da učitelj očekuje od pomoćnika prilagodbu učeniku i da ne zahtijeva od njega više nego dopuštaju učenikove sposobnosti. U suradnji s pomoćnicima učitelji su se susretali i s pomoćnicima koji nisu bili uspješni u praćenju dinamike razvoja pojedinoga učenika.

Tolerancija kao kompetencija pojavila se samo u jednom intervjuu s fokusnom grupom: „Pomoćnik mora tolerirati učenikove teškoće” (1208). Prilikom rangiranja ni jedna fokusna grupa nije uvrstila tu kompetenciju među prvih deset. Budući da tolerirati ne znači i prihvaćati, dobiveni rezultat da toleranciju učitelji ne smatraju

poželjnom kompetencijom kod pomoćnika, može se protumačiti da je smatraju poželjnom perspektivom.

Odgovornost se u intervjuima rijetko spominjala. U zasebnim raspravama razrednih i predmetnih učitelja javila se u dvije fokusne grupe, i to na 4. mjestu kod učitelja razredne nastave te u fokusnoj grupi učitelja predmetne nastave na 3. mjestu. Pretpostavljamo da učitelji pretežito smatraju kako je odgovornost primarno zadatak učitelja i stručne službe, a pomoćnik samo treba slijediti njihove upute. U školama u kojima je odgovornost među prvih četiri kompetencije iz analize konteksta nameće se pretpostavka da su tome pridonijeli vrlo kvalitetni i educirani pomoćnici ili/i pak, nedostatak stručnjaka u školi za prilagodbu nastavnoga programa potrebama učenika.

Savjesnost kao potrebna osobna kompetencija pomoćnika u nastavi navodi se samo u jednoj fokusnoj grupi. Pod tom kompetencijom podrazumijevaju dobronamjernost i osjećaj da se dobro ili loše radi i rangiraju je na 6. mjesto, a u obrazloženju primjerice navode: „Moraš po svojoj savjesti postupati. Ne možeš u razredu jedno biti s učiteljicom, a drugo s roditeljem... prepričavati neke stvari” (1208).

Pored navedenih kompetencija, u fokusnim grupama spominjale su se i neke pojedinačne kompetencije, kao npr. upornost, fleksibilnost, srdačnost („Uputiti lijepu riječ učeniku”), objektivnost, „bez maske”, ljudskost („Pomoći svakome kome treba”).

Dublji uvid u perspektivu učitelja o kompetencijama pomoćnika omogućuju i izjave učitelja da ih smeta „Glasni rad asistentice s učenicom, pa ih ponekad pošaljem u kabinet” (5232), ili da „Asistentica ponekad reagira kao starija sestra, vadi stvari iz učenikove torbe, za što nema potrebe”, ili „Asistentica nije osposobljena za rad s tako velikim teškoćama, ali ni za pedagoški rad”, pa je „učiteljica educira”, ili „Asistentica je preplašena zbog težine teškoće djeteta” (6237), ili „Nekvalitetan asistent napravi više štete nego da učenik nema asistenta” (1206). U tri fokusne grupe učitelji su se žalili na neprikladan odnos i rad pomoćnika s učenikom: krutost u radu, „prezaštitnički” odnos, „nisu se našli”, viču na učenika, nisu pripremljeni za rad, nemaju uvijek prikladan odnos prema drugim učenicima, često se mijenjaju pomoćnici, idu linijom manjega otpora, neki nemaju senzibilitet. Takva iskustva najčešće dolaze iz škola koje nemaju kompletan stručni tim (najčešće nedostaje specijalist za metodičko-didaktički pristup poučavanju učenika s teškoćama).

Međutim, mnogo je i pozitivnih iskustava učitelja neovisno o kontekstu škole, dužini rada učitelja i dužini iskustva s pomoćnicima: „Velika su pomoć učitelju da može raditi s drugom djecom i da se učenik osjeća sigurno” (2209), „U cijelom je razredu bolja atmosfera” (6236), „Lakše je raditi u razredu u kojemu je asistent” (7243), „Slijedi upute” (4226), „Susretljiv, strpljiv, fleksibilan” (4229), „Moralna podrška ostalima, više godina radi u školi” (5231).

Osobne kompetencije navodili su gotovo svi učitelji, najviše *empatiju i komunikacijske vještine*, pa motiviranost, razumijevanje, dosljednost i strpljenje. Empatija i komunikacijske vještine bile su isticane u raspravama svih grupa, kao i u podgrupama prema zanimanju. Karakteristično je da se u intervjuu s fokusnom grupom za ove kompetencije opredjeljuju

učitelji s dužim radnim stažem i s više godina suradnje s pomoćnicima. Za empatiju se opredjeljuju i razredni i predmetni učitelji, čak ju predmetni učitelji u dvije fokusne grupe stavljaju na prvo mjesto. Motiviranost su različito pojmovno definirali učitelji razredne i učitelji predmetne nastave. Prvi je povezuju s ljubavlju prema djeci, a drugi s angažiranošću. U jednoj fokusnoj grupi nije se našla ni među prvih osam kompetencija. Komunikacijske vještine samo u jednoj fokusnoj grupi stavljene su na prvo mjesto, i to u istoj onoj grupi koja ključnom ne smatra motiviranost. Prema analizi konteksta pretpostavlja se da se u tom slučaju suradnji poklanja veća pažnja organizacijom rada s pomoćnicima, pa kvaliteta rada pomoćnika manje ovisi o njegovoj individualnoj volji za rad.

Dosljednost je samo u jednoj fokusnoj grupi zauzela visoko 2. mjesto i opet kod iskusnih učitelja i onih s dužim radom s pomoćnicima (četiri do osam godina). S obzirom na važnost ove kompetencije, ona bi trebala biti više zastupljena. Ista je fokusna grupa podržala i strpljivost, no tu su kompetenciju napominjale i ostale, osim jedne fokusne grupe. Strpljenje u ovom slučaju može biti sinonim za poznavanje djeteta i prilagodbu rada njegovim sposobnostima i interesima neovisno o dinamici razvoja ostalih učenika. Specifična je i prisutnost odgovornosti koja je, čini se, povezana s iskustvom učitelja u svojim školama u odnosu na izbor pomoćnika i profil stručnjaka s kojim se mogu konzultirati.

Stoga bi odgovor na prvo istraživačko pitanje bio da učitelji percipiraju važnost profesionalnih i osobnih kompetencija pomoćnika u nastavi, premda se lakše opredjeljuju za osobne nego za profesionalne kompetencije. Kod profesionalnih kompetencija važno im je da pomoćnici imaju pedagoška znanja i da su stručni. Od osobnih kompetencija empatija i komunikacijske vještine učiteljima su najvažnije. Nešto su manje važne motiviranost i strpljenje pomoćnika. Prilikom izbora kompetencija pokazala se važnost konteksta, prvenstveno iskustva iz vlastite škole. Pristup organizaciji rada pomoćnika od strane lokalne uprave odražava se također na iskustvo i perspektivu učitelja o kompetencijama pomoćnika u nastavi jer država nije regulirala koje to kompetencije treba imati pomoćnik.

### ***Kompetencije za poslove pomoćnika iz perspektive pomoćnika u nastavi***

Iz tematskoga područja kvalitativnoga istraživanja pomoćnika u nastavi *Iskustvo i osposobljenost pomoćnika za rad s učenicima s teškoćama* proizašla je tema *Kompetentnost za poslove pomoćnika u nastavi iz perspektive pomoćnika*. Temeljem postupka kvalitetne analize dobivene su kategorije profesionalne i osobne kompetencije pomoćnika (Tablica 6)

Tablica 6.

### ***Profesionalne kompetencije***

U Tablici 7. prikazane su profesionalne kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive pomoćnika.



Tablica 7.

Profesionalne kompetencije pomoćnika različite su od grada do grada, kao i od škole do škole. U sve tri fokusne grupe sudjelovali su zaposleni pomoćnici sa SSS i pomoćnici s VSS društvenoga ili tehničkoga područja. U 1. i 3. fokusnoj grupi bili su i studenti te pomoćnici s pedagoškom strukom. U 1. fokusnoj grupi bio je jedan pomoćnik stručnjak za rad s učenicima s teškoćama. U 2. fokusnoj grupi sudjelovali su pomoćnici sa srednjom i visokom stručnom spremom pedagoške struke te VSS iz drugih društvenih i tehničkoga područja. U 3. fokusnoj grupi (tri škole većega grada) bili su pomoćnici sa srednjom stručnom spremom, studenti i pomoćnici s visokom stručnom spremom pedagoške struke i drugih društvenih te tehničkih područja.

U odnosu na njihovu osposobljenost za poslove pomoćnika uočljivo je da ni jedan pomoćnik sa SSS nije bio bez edukacije za pomoćnika. Međutim, dio pomoćnika studenata i pomoćnika s VSS bili su bez edukacije od 20 ili 218 sati. U 1. fokusnoj grupi pomoćnici u nastavi, student i dva pomoćnika s VSS društvenoga i tehničkoga područja bili su bez edukacije. U 2. i 3. fokusnoj grupi pomoćnici s VSS pedagoške struke bili su bez edukacije, a u 3. fokusnoj grupi je i pomoćnik s VSS društvenoga područja bio bez edukacije.

Edukaciju od 20 sati, osim pomoćnika sa SSS, prošao je i dio studenata i pomoćnika s VSS društvenoga i tehničkoga područja iz dviju fokusnih grupa u manjim gradovima (1. i 2. fokusna grupa) te jedan pomoćnik pedagoške struke iz 2. fokusne grupe. Osposobljavanje za poslove pomoćnika od 218 sati stekla su dva pomoćnika sa SSS iz 1. i 3. fokusne grupe, te tri pomoćnika s VSS iz 3. fokusne grupe. Neki pomoćnici prošli su i dodatne edukacije, i to iz znakovnog jezika (7125), poremećaja iz autističnoga spektra (7127) te iz Downova sindroma („Asistentica je prošla edukaciju u Udruzi za Down sindrom i sada povremeno odlazi na prijedlog roditelja” (3107), a to povećava njihove profesionalne kompetencije. Pomoćnici su navodili da je važno njihovo iskustvo rada s djecom u vrtiću ili kao treneri (6122) te završeni studij društvenoga usmjerenja (2106). Edukaciju od 20 sati nisu smatrali dovoljnom (7124, 6121), dok oni koji su završili osposobljavanje od 218 sati zadovoljni su stečenim znanjima (1101, 1104). Neki su pomoćnici isticali važnost znanja i stalnoga stručnog usavršavanja (1103, 4114). Razlike među pomoćnicima iz različitih škola moguće je uočiti na primjeru većega grada: dok u jednoj školi pomoćnici bez edukacije vjeruju kako su dosadašnjim iskustvom stekli potrebna znanja te da im koriste znanja s fakulteta društvenoga usmjerenja, u drugoj školi, u kojoj su pomoćnici prošli edukaciju od 218 sati, i nadalje koriste svaku priliku da nešto nauče i drže da im je edukacija puno pomogla.

### **Osobne kompetencije**

U Tablici 8. može se vidjeti kako pomoćnici percipiraju svoje osobne kompetencije za poslove pomoćnika koji sada obavljaju.

Tablica 8.

U sve tri fokusne grupe pomoćnika navodi se empatija kao važna osobna kompetencija, primjerice „Za asistenta je važno da voli djecu” (1101). U 2. i 3. fokusnoj grupi istaknuto je strpljenje („Trebalo biti opskrbljen strpljenjem zbog prirode posla”, 1103) i osobno iskustvo roditeljstva (5118, 1102). Pored navedenih osobnih kompetencija, u 2. fokusnoj grupi pažnja pomoćnika usmjerena je fleksibilnost („U radu je potrebna fleksibilnost koja se očituje u prilagodbi potrebama djeteta”, 5116) i razumijevanju. U 3. fokusnoj grupi, uz empatiju, strpljenje i osobno iskustvo roditeljstva, ističu se i komunikacijske vještine („znanje iz komunikacije s ljudima stečeno na studiju”, 2106). Zanimljiv je stav jednog pomoćnika, studenta bez edukacije: „Ne treba pripremljenost, jer iz djeteta treba iščitavati. Iz knjiga se to ne može naučiti” (6123).

Takvi su stavovi razumljivi budući da je znanje većine pomoćnika o radu s učenicima s teškoćama nedostavno, bilo da je riječ o onima srednje stručne spreme sa samo 20 sati edukacije ili su VSS iz nekog društvenoga područja koje ne uključuje pedagoška znanja ili iz tehničkoga područja. Očito da su se mnogi, vođeni empatijom prema djeci, zaposlili kao pomoćnici i u radu im pomaže strpljenje. Ako se nisu pobliže upoznali s dokumentacijom o učeniku i nisu dobili jasnu sliku o razini i načinu funkcioniranja, strpljivost im je glavno sredstvo u nošenju sa zahtjevima u učenju i ponašanju koji se postavljaju pred učenika. U ovom istraživanju došlo se do spoznaje kako mogu biti snažno motivirani oni pomoćnici koji traže svoje novo zanimanje, posebno osobe starije od 35 godina. Posebice žene koje za vrijeme odrastanja svoje djece nisu bile zaposlene, nego su odgajale djecu i nisu se usavršavale u svojoj struci. One posao pomoćnika drže svojim prikladnim zanimanjem, a iskustvo koje su stekle pružajući podršku svojoj djeci u odgoju i obrazovanju, smatraju odgovarajućim.

U svojem novom poslu, koji je nov i učiteljima, pomoćnici se često moraju snalaziti u novim situacijama i biti spremni tražiti puteve pristupa učeniku, ali i komunikaciji s učiteljima i roditeljima, pa ocjenjuju da im je važna fleksibilnost. Samo je u jednoj (3. fokusnoj grupi pomoćnika) navedeno da su važne komunikacijske vještine, što većini još nije jasno, posebno ako nisu osposobljeni za poslove pomoćnika.

Odgovor na drugo istraživačko pitanje sadrži zaključak da samo dio pomoćnika percipira važnost osposobljenosti, a do njega smo došli analizom osposobljenosti pomoćnika temeljem stručne spreme i edukacija za osposobljavanje za poslove pomoćnika u nastavi, kao i njihovom percepcijom osposobljenosti. Važnost osposobljavanja uviđaju pomoćnici pedagoške struke s još dodatnim kraćim edukacijama. Međutim, neki studenti ili pomoćnici sa završenim studijem iz društvenoga područja (primjerice politologija, filozofija, pravo), smatraju da su osposobljeni i da će neposrednim iskustvom steći potrebna znanja. Uočljive su razlike među školama kako u profesionalnim kompetencijama, tako i u percepciji osobnih kompetencija. Empatija kao osobna kompetencija bila je istaknuta u svim fokusnim grupama i školama. Neki od pomoćnika, starijih od 35 godina, odabrali su posao pomoćnika kao svoje sadašnje zanimanje rukovodeći se iskustvom sa svojom djecom te su završili i program osposobljavanja za pomoćnika. Pomoćnici posebno vrednuju empatiju i strpljenje kao važne osobne

kompetencije jer u kontekstu njihova radnoga mjesta one imaju značajnu ulogu. Neke druge neophodne osobne kompetencije za ovaj posao, kao što su komunikacijske vještine, nažalost nisu prepoznali.

### ***Usporedba kompetencija iz perspektive učitelja i perspektive pomoćnika***

U tablicama 9. i 10. i slikama 1. i 2. uspoređuju se profesionalne i osobne kompetencije pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja i iz perspektive pomoćnika. U svrhu preglednosti rezultata kod usporedbe pomoćnika 3. fokusne grupe pomoćnika koji su iz tri škole većega grada kao i učitelji, rezultirati učitelja (3.FGU, 4. FGU i 5. FGU) prikazani su objedinjeno u jednoj 3. fokusnoj grupi učitelja.

Tablica 9.

Slika 1.

Usporedbom profesionalnih kompetencija između učitelja i pomoćnika (Tablica 9., Slika 1.) može se zaključiti sljedeće:

U 1. fokusnoj grupi pomoćnika jednoga manjeg grada, učitelji istih škola smatraju da je najvažnije da su pomoćnici pedagoške struke, a pomoćnici iste fokusne grupe su VSS društvenoga usmjerenja, ali ne i pedagoške struke te studenti. Troje ima uvodnu edukaciju od 20 sati, dvoje su bez edukacije za pomoćnika, a samo su dvoje osposobljeni za pomoćnika s potrebnim pedagoškim znanjima, što znači da se djelomično podudaraju.

Učitelji 2. fokusne grupe drugoga manjeg grada preferiraju poznavanje sadržaja predmeta i pedagošku struku. Pomoćnici iste fokusne grupe imaju pedagoška znanja jer su učitelji razredne nastave te odgovaraju perspektivi učitelja. Svi imaju 20-satnu edukaciju i navode da im je edukacija važna.

U 3. fokusnoj grupi pomoćnika iz većega grada i škola objedinjene 3. fokusne grupe učitelja, čiji su prioriteti bili stručnost/ sadržaj predmeta, pedagoška struka i visoka stručna sprema, uočljiva je djelomična podudarnost profesionalnih kompetencija pomoćnika i prioriteta učitelja istih škola. Pomoćnici imaju visoku stručnu spremu, ali su različitih struka, neki društvenoga usmjerenja (ali ne pedagoškoga), a neki su tehničke struke. U jednoj školi (ujedno i fokusnoj grupi) čiji učitelji zastupaju pedagošku struku ili znanja, pomoćnici su u tijeku ili su završili osposobljavanje za pomoćnika u nastavi, pa imaju i potrebnu pedagošku osnovu. U fokusnoj grupi učitelja koja ističe potrebu stručnoga znanja iz predmeta, pomoćnik je društvenoga usmjerenja i bez edukacije. Mišljenja pomoćnika su različita, od toga da je važna edukacija (primjerice u školi gdje su učiteljima prioritet pedagoška znanja), do toga da je pomoćnik društvenoga usmjerenja uz neposredno iskustvo kompetentan za pomoćnika (u fokusnoj grupi učitelja koji ističu sadržaj predmeta).

Tablica 10.

Slika 2.

Usporednom analizom osobnih kompetencija pomoćnika iz perspektive učitelja i pomoćnika (Tablica 10., Slika 2.) moguće je zaključiti sljedeće:

Podudarnost se uočava u odnosu na važnost empatije i strpljenja. Empatija je prisutna u sve tri fokusne grupe pomoćnika, kao i kod 2. i 3. fokus grupe učitelja, a strpljenje se javlja u dvije fokusne grupe pomoćnika (2. i 3. FG) te u prvoj, drugoj i trećoj fokus grupi učitelja. Komunikacijske vještine, koje se kod učitelja javljaju u 1. i 3. objedinjenoj fokus grupi, kod pomoćnika su prisutne samo u 3. fokus grupi pomoćnika. Međutim, ni motiviranost / angažiranost i dosljednost pomoćnika kao osobne kompetentnosti, a ni odgovornost, nisu prisutne u perspektivi pomoćnika. Kod pomoćnika važno mjesto u dvije fokusne grupe zauzima iskustvo roditeljstva te se pojavljuje fleksibilnost i razumijevanje, koje se i kod učitelja javlja samo pojedinačno u intervjuima s fokusnim grupama.

Kao odgovor na treće istraživačko pitanje utvrđeno je da se percepcije kompetencija pomoćnika u nastavi učitelja i pomoćnika samo djelomično podudaraju. Činjenica jest da se ni sami učitelji ne slažu u stavovima o kompetencijama pomoćnika te da ovi ovise o kontekstu, iskustvu učitelja i samoj školi u kojoj je učitelj zaposlen, kao i o praksi osnivača škola. Isto se tako ni kompetencije pomoćnika u nastavi između škola i fokusnih grupa ne podudaraju u njihovim perspektivama. Međutim, valja upozoriti kako svaka nepodudarnost u percepciji kompetentnosti za poslove pomoćnika među neposrednim suradnicima u procesu poučavanja u razredu, učiteljima i pomoćnicima, rezultira nepovoljnim učincima na učenike s teškoćama, ali i na cijeli razred.

## **Ograničenja generalizacije**

Prilikom upućavanja rezultata ovoga kvalitativnog istraživanja potrebno je voditi računa o određenim ograničenjima. Ponajprije, sudionici istraživanja su iz tri grada središnje Hrvatske, a izbor je škola bio prigodan. S obzirom da su odabrane škole tijekom nekoliko prethodnih godina imale neki od oblika podrške CIP IDEM-a, moguće je da je u njihovim percepcijama kompetencija više prisutan inkluzivni pristup nego u drugim školama. Učitelji, naime, ističu da su pomoćnicima potrebna pedagoška znanja, ali također smatraju da su komunikacijske vještine važne, dapače neophodne za interakciju s drugim učenicima jer su pomoćnici često uključeni i u rad s drugim učenicima. Moguće je da u drugim sredinama nije tako budući da su se upute osnivača škola međusobno razlikovale u odnosu na to trebaju li pomoćnici isključivo raditi s jednim učenikom s teškoćama ili ne. Isto tako, učitelji-sudionici projekta imali su duže iskustvo rada s pomoćnicima nego je to slučaj u drugim hrvatskim školama. Kako u prethodnih deset godina nije bio jasno određen način izbora pomoćnika, pa se izbor razlikuje od škole do škole i od osnivača do osnivača, moguća je pretpostavka da će se provedbom Pravilnika o pomoćnicima u nastavi i komunikacijskim posrednicima (2018) bolje uskladiti kompetencije pomoćnika u nastavi i da će one više dobiti na važnosti, naročito profesionalne kompetencije. Slično je i s načinom zapošljavanja. Dio pomoćnika iz našega istraživanja bio je zaposlen na temelju ugovora o radu, a dio je

imao ugovor o djelu, pa je moguće da kada ovo zanimanje bude pružalo veću sigurnost radnoga mjesta, da će i osposobljavanje za pomoćnika u nastavi imati veću važnost za potencijalne pomoćnike te da će više pomoćnika biti odgovarajuće osposobljeno, nego što su ovdje pokazali rezultati.

I u Engleskoj su se edukacije pomoćnika prije 2001. godine često odnosile samo na upoznavanje s ulogom pomoćnika, slično kao i naše, hrvatske 20-satne uvodne edukacije ili su bile usmjerene samo na podizanje samopouzdanja pomoćnika. Budući da kroz takvu edukaciju pomoćnici nisu stjecali kompetencije za rad u razredu, to je rezultiralo njihovim nezadovoljstvom, na što su upozorila i neka tamošnja istraživanja (Swann i Loxley, 1994; prema: Blachford i sur., 2009). Stoga pretpostavljamo da će se nakon što se zakonski regulira zanimanje pomoćnika, u ponovljenim istraživanjima i u nas dobiti povoljniji rezultati ovoga oblika podrške obrazovnoj inkluziji.

## Zaključci i prijedlozi

Nakon deset godina od postupnoga uvođenja pomoćnika u škole i vrlo neujednačene prakse korištenja pomoćnika u nastavi, ne samo u različitim područjima Hrvatske, nego i unutar istoga grada, postalo je jasno da je neophodno ujednačiti praksu. Jedini način da učenik s teškoćama u svim dijelovima Hrvatske ostvaruje jednaka prava jest donošenje regulative koja će pojasniti i ulogu pomoćnika u nastavi, i suradnju učitelja i pomoćnika u nastavi te omogućiti da pomoćnik u nastavi postane novo zanimanje u Hrvatskoj. Analize zadovoljstva polaznika edukacija u Engleskoj, nakon što su doneseni profesionalni standardi i utvrđene potrebne kompetencije, pokazale su da je gotovo dvije trećine polaznika zadovoljno edukacijom i mogućnostima profesionalnoga razvoja.

Temeljem rezultata istraživanja prezentiranoga u ovom radu, moguće je zaključiti sljedeće:

1. Učitelji očekuju od pomoćnika da imaju pedagoška znanja, ali je prisutno i mišljenje da trebaju imati stručna znanja iz nastavnih predmeta. Preferiraju visoku naobrazbu, što djelomično odgovara kompetencijama pomoćnika koji sada rade. Međutim, upravo pomoćnicima s takvim kompetencijama posao pomoćnika u nastavi samo je privremeni posao, dok ne nađu drugi, prikladniji njihovoj spremi, što ponekad znači tek nekoliko mjeseci, a najčešće godinu dana rada na mjestu pomoćnika. Stoga je izbor takvih pomoćnika neekonomičan, a još manje prikladan za školu i učenika. Mijenjanje pomoćnika nije dobra opcija jer se ponovo mora uvoditi nova osoba i gubi se vrijeme na prilagodbu.
2. Učitelji smatraju da je najvažnije da su pomoćnici empatični i strpljivi. U tome se podudaraju s mišljenjem pomoćnika. Učitelji preferiraju i komunikacijske vještine pomoćnika, odnosno da su ovi spremni za suradnju, što ne odgovara perspektivi pomoćnika u nastavi. Odgovornost i dosljednost ni učitelji ni pomoćnici ne smatraju prioritetnim kompetencijama.
3. Pomoćnici stariji od 35 godina sa završenim osposobljavanjem za pomoćnika u nastavi žele ostati raditi kao pomoćnici. Zanimanje pomoćnik njihov je odabir

profesionalne karijere, što je u skladu s rezultatima istraživanja u svijetu (Vincent i sur., 2005).

4. Pomoćnicima je potrebno osigurati punu pripremljenost za njihovu ulogu u razredu te početi koristiti intervencije temeljene na empirijskim dokazima kako bi podržali pomoćnike u nastavi u individualnom poučavanju i poučavanju manjih grupa (to ističu i najnovija istraživanja u svijetu, npr. Bakopoulou, 2018).

Iz navedenoga proizlaze određeni prijedlozi za unapređenje politike obrazovanja u području mjesta i uloge pomoćnika u nastavi u inkluzivnim obrazovanju:

1. pri izboru pomoćnika potrebno je voditi računa o spremnosti odabrane osobe da ostane duže vrijeme u zanimanju pomoćnik u nastavi
2. pomoćnik u nastavi treba biti osposobljen za poslove pomoćnika s potrebnim osobnim i profesionalnim kompetencijama
3. potrebna je sustavna edukacija učitelja o ulozi pomoćnika u nastavi
4. neophodna je zakonska regulativa kojom će se utvrditi nacionalni standard zanimanja pomoćnik u nastavi i njegov kvalifikacijski okvir te u skladu s time programi osposobljavanja pomoćnika u nastavi i
5. dobrom organizacijom škole i pripremljenošću učitelja valja osigurati timski rad s pomoćnicima.