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Implementation of the course *Practice Teaching of the Japanese Language and Culture*

Preliminarno priopćenje

Preliminary communication

UDK: 378.147.091.33-027.22:811.521'243

<https://doi.org/10.32728/tab.18.2021.10>

ABSTRACT

Considering the global increase in the number of Japanese language learners, the need to establish educational institutions (primary, secondary, higher education, non-school education) for Japanese language learning also arose in Croatia and, subsequently, the necessity to foster a new generation of qualified teachers with sufficient theoretical and practical background in teaching Japanese as a foreign language. The purpose of this paper is to examine and describe the process of implementing the graduate course *Practice Teaching of the Japanese Language and Culture*, along with its challenges such as online classes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper discusses the role of teachers as facilitators, the role of students as trainees and the role of learners, i.e. the participants of an intensive two-week Japanese language course, which is part of the abovementioned graduate course. Furthermore, the paper discusses the learner survey and the trainee self-evaluation report with respect to the improvement of their knowledge.

Keywords: Japanese as a foreign language, syllabus, teaching plan, facilitator, lifelong learning, autonomy, Japanese language teaching, higher education, practice teaching

1. INTRODUCTION

According to a survey conducted by the Japan Foundation, there was an increase in the number of institutions, teachers and learners of Japanese language in Eastern Europe including Croatia in 2018 compared to 2015. According to this, there were 5 institutions, 11 teachers and 175 learners in Croatia in 2015, whereas in 2018 there were 7 institutions, 19 teachers and 199 learners. As for the composition of learners by educational stage, there were 7 learners in primary education, none in secondary education, 45 in higher education and 147 in non-school education, i.e. language schools and public courses (Japan Foundation 2015 - 2018).

This shows that the number of institutions, learners and teachers has a trend of increasing. While there is no possibility to learn Japanese language as an elective course in high schools, there was an evident increase in the number of learners in non-school education, i.e. language schools in cities such as, for example, Zagreb, Rijeka, Split and Zadar. A survey¹ involving 164 students from 7 high schools in Croatia was conducted in relation to their needs, interests, motivation and attitudes towards the Japanese language and culture. As a result, more than a half of the students indicated they would like to study Japanese in their high school (Kikumoto 2019).

As for the neighboring countries, Moritoki Škof (2018) reported that no elementary and secondary educational institution provided a Japanese language courses in Slovenia. The University of Ljubljana is the only higher educational institution in the country offering an undergraduate and graduate program in Japanese studies, as well as a graduate level teacher training program. In Serbia, on the other hand, there are no university level didactic course in the higher education (Tričković 2018: 78-79).

With an increasing interest in the Japanese language, the need has arisen to foster a new generation of young teachers with sufficient theoretical and practical background teaching Japanese as a foreign language, i.e. Japanese language didactics and pedagogy. Therefore, three courses related to teaching Japanese as a foreign language were included in the graduate program of Japanese studies, established at Juraj Dobrila University of Pula in 2020². The

1 The survey was part of the project "Visiting secondary schools in Croatia", implemented by the Department of Asian Studies at the Faculty of Humanities in Pula in 2018 with the support of the Japan Foundation.

2 Currently, this is the only accredited graduate course of Japanese studies in Croatia.

purpose of this paper is to examine and describe the process of implementing the graduate course *Practice Teaching of the Japanese Language and Culture* (Praksa u nastavi japanskog jezika i kulture, hereinafter referred to as PNJJK) in the academic year 2020/21. This paper involves a discussion of (a) the role of teachers as facilitators, (b) the role of students as trainees and (c) the role of learners as participants in the intensive two-week Japanese language course³.

The following research questions are investigated in this paper:

1. What teaching skills and methods did the trainees acquire and what aspects of the course can be improved upon in the future?
2. Which methods and approaches were effective in the teacher training course?

The implementation of the course PNJJK was challenging for the facilitators (i.e. teaching staff), trainees (i.e. students) and Japanese language learners (i.e. participants), as this was the first generation of students enrolled in the graduate program. Moreover, the implementation was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and classes had to be organized online.

2. SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE GRADUATE PROGRAM OF JAPANESE STUDIES AT THE JURAJ DOBRILA UNIVERSITY

The graduate program in Japanese studies comprises two years (four semesters) and students can choose between 3 programs: a single major teacher training program, a single major general program and a double major general program. The two single major graduate programs, Japanese studies – teaching program and Japanese studies – general program, mostly overlap, differing only in the teaching module. The Japanese studies – general program focuses more on philological training and providing market-oriented skills which increase the students' employability, while the teaching program focuses on conveying skills required in the field of teaching Japanese as a foreign language.

As Lo Bianco (2009: 59) noted, “a critical component of the second language acquisition strategy, perhaps the most important, is teacher

3 From here on the professors teaching the course PNJJK will be referred as facilitators, graduate students taking the course PNJJK as trainees and participants in the intensive two-week online Japanese language course as learners.

education so that the ordinary preparation of teachers produces specialists able to design and implement high-quality programs". The graduate program in Japanese studies offers three courses in Japanese language teaching that are obligatory for single-major teaching program students and elective for students studying the single and double major general study program in the first year: Japanese language teaching methodology 1 (Metodika nastave japanskog jezika 1, hereinafter MNJJ 1), Japanese language teaching methodology 2 (Metodika nastave japanskog jezika 2, hereinafter MNJJ 2) and Practice Teaching of the Japanese Language and Culture (Praksa u nastavi japanskog jezika i kulture, PNJJK).

The course MNJJ 1 includes general knowledge and a historical approach to language teaching focusing on Japanese didactics and pedagogy. The course MNJJ 2 covers more specific aspects of foreign language teaching and language acquisition. The contents are as follows:

Table 1. Overview of the courses MNJJ 1 and MNJJ 2

Course name	Contents
MNJJ 1 (1st semester) Metodika nastave japanskog jezika 1 (Japanese language teaching methodology 1)	Personal history of language learning; History of Japanese language teaching; CEFR and JF-Standard ⁴ ; Teaching methodology; Life-long learning; Inclusive education; Textbook analysis.
MNJJ 2 (2nd semester) Metodika nastave japanskog jezika 2 (Japanese language teaching methodology 2)	New learning methods (Active learning, flip classroom...) Course management; Syllabus and teaching plan; Assessment; Practical examples to develop reading / writing / speaking / listening / intercommunicative skills with regard to Japanese language learning.

MNJJ 1 focuses on acquiring general knowledge of language education, while MNJJ 2 focuses on acquiring specific knowledge of Japanese language teaching based on the linguistic features and phonological characteristics in Japanese and the comparative analysis between the Croatian and Japanese

⁴ The JF-Standard is a modified framework of proficiency for Japanese language education based on the CEFR.

language. The course PNJJK involves practical teacher training and is taught simultaneously with MNJJ 2 in the second semester of the first year.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF TEACHER TRAINING

Before introducing the outline of the course PNJJK, we take a general view of the theoretical background of foreign language and Japanese language teacher training, which the course is based on. The recent history of language teaching had a remarkable period in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it underwent many fundamental changes. Prior to this period, teacher education programs were based on the hypotheses that a teacher can employ any method, which can bring about an effective acquisition of the skills of the target language. Thus, the focus of teacher practice shifted to teachers and learners in the classroom, “who are best suited to implement appropriate, relevant, and effective instruction” (Hinkel 2006: 110-111).

In other words, teacher training did not focus on applying a specific method in language teaching, but on creating a teacher’s own teaching method “by blending aspects of other methods in a principled manner” (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 183) to implement effective instruction. From that point of view, the language teaching programs consisted of learning about teaching a foreign language in a certain context, then observing and practicing teaching in another, and developing effective teaching behaviors in a third context (Freeman and Johnson 1998: 399). Referring to this shift, Vygotsky’s principles can be identified. The Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical perspective explains that an individual’s cognition is developed through social interaction by people, concepts and interaction. Simultaneously, the view of teachers shifted from a transmitter of language knowledge to active participants in the construction of meaning (Crandall 2000: 35). Although social interaction and activities should not be avoided in teacher training, Johnson and Golombek (2020) emphasize the didactic views and the need of mediation in a class, and propose the following central domains of language teacher education (LTE) pedagogy:

LTE pedagogy must:

1. be located;
2. recognize who the teacher is and who the teacher wishes to become;
3. be intentional and goal-directed: these intentions and goals must be made explicit;
4. create opportunities to externalize everyday concepts while internalizing relevant academic concepts through authentic, goal-directed activities of teaching;
5. contain structured mediational spaces where teachers are encouraged to play/step into being and becoming a teacher;
6. involve expert mediation that is responsive to teachers' immediate and future needs;
7. have a self-inquiry dimension, involving teacher educators and teachers working together or by themselves, in which they seek to trace teacher professional development as it unfolds over time and place;
8. demonstrate a relationship of influence between teacher professional development (as a result of LTE pedagogies) and student learning. (Johnson and Golombek 2020: 119)

Additionally, let us briefly examine the revised contents of the Japanese teacher training program composed by the Japan governmental committee of the Agency for cultural affairs (Bunkacho: 2019). It is worth mentioning that the revised version in 2019 extends its range of Japanese language teaching to teaching outside Japan, which referred only to Japanese language teaching in Japan in the previous version published in 2000 (Bunkacho 2020). Bunkacho (2019) proposes a standard program for Japanese language teachers relying on the educational system of the local country, the relationship between the country and Japan and intercultural management. While the Bunkacho (2019) emphasizes the inter- and socio-cultural aspect of language teaching, international surveys (Takagi and Sato 2006, Nuibe 2010) reported that Japanese language teachers outside Japan were required to have the practical proficiency, such as course and classroom management, and personal qualities necessary for establishing an amicable atmosphere as mentioned in Takagi and Sato (2006) and Nuibe (2010).

4. OUTLINE OF THE COURSE PNJJK (PRACTICE TEACHING OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE)

Teacher training in Croatia, where the usage of the Japanese language is not common, should involve both proficiency in language and in teaching methods. As for language proficiency, the trainees (i.e. students) should understand the linguistic features of listening, pronouncing, reading and writing in the process of Japanese language learning. They also need to acquire the knowledge of various teaching methods and their features in order to manage the class activities aimed at efficient learning. Thus, the expected learning outcomes of PNJJK are as follows:

1. to get acquainted with the didactic-methodological principles of teaching Japanese as a foreign language; techniques, methods and approaches to teaching a foreign language; types of knowledge assessment, evaluation and assessment; ways of monitoring and planning classes; types of textbooks and teaching materials for the Japanese language; selecting, editing and creating additional learning materials; ways of evaluation and self-evaluation of conducted lessons and classes.
2. to use an appropriate approach or working method, to select appropriate learning materials for the target group and, if necessary, create their own; to monitor and test students' knowledge of Japanese language
3. to monitor, record, evaluate the learning process; to plan their responsibilities; to critically evaluate their own decisions and conclusions during pedagogical practice; to critically evaluate the performance of their peers.
4. to search, select, analyze and evaluate different teaching materials; to develop the ability to self-analyze; consider the connection to lifelong learning; to develop skills for group work.

In the academic year 2020/2021, there were 9 students who enrolled in the PNJJK course. The practical part of the course (teaching the Japanese language in a classroom), which was initially supposed to be conducted in an elementary and/or high school classroom, was held in the form of an intensive two-week beginner Japanese language course (90min. x 10 times) using the online video platform Zoom. This course was intended for the general public, meaning anyone could apply to attend the intensive course. The participants were divided into two groups. The participants in group A chose to learn the basics of everyday Japanese, while those in group B chose to learn basic Japanese to be used with Japanese tourists visiting Croatia.

The 9 trainees taught each class in pairs, one as the main instructor, the other as the assistant. Each trainee had three to four opportunities to teach as the main teacher in the class. The number of teaching hours are higher than teacher training for other subjects at elementary and secondary school in Croatia. As reported in Takagi and Sato (2006) and Nuibe (2010), a Japanese language teacher outside Japan is required to have course and classroom management skills, so the PNJJK course offers an opportunity for students to organize and teach the whole intensive course.

In PNJJK, students are expected to use the knowledge of the other 2 graduate program Japanese language teacher training courses. Teachers take the role of facilitators, i.e. they set the time schedule, control if an activity is carried out by the trainees appropriately and advise the trainees when they encounter a problem that they cannot solve by themselves. However, the teachers are not involved in the actual teaching process.

For trainees, i.e. students enrolled in this course, class observation was the first step in becoming aware of the teacher's role and class management. The aim of this activity is for the trainees to become aware of the structure of the class and how to prepare and devise the structure of their own class. The trainees also observed the skills of sharing a PPT using online tools, writing on the virtual "white board" and practicing in pairs or a group in a virtual classroom (Big Blue Button and Google Meet). The trainees had to write and submit the teaching plan of three different classes they observed to the facilitators, who would then give feedback regarding the submitted teaching plan. By completing this activity, trainees are expected to learn how to devise a class and how to compose a teaching plan sheet.

5. OUTLINE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE FACILITATORS AND TEACHER TRAINING PRACTICE (TWO-WEEK INTENSIVE JAPANESE LANGUAGE COURSE)

A total of 15 people from various parts of Croatia applied for the Japanese language course. They were assigned to either group A (7) or group B (8), based on their interests and prior knowledge of the Japanese language. According to the questionnaire the participants took before the intensive course, the most common reason mentioned for applying to the course was their interest in and desire to learn Japanese language and culture.

The trainees had to design the syllabus for the entire intensive course, clearly stating the learning outcome and the content of each class, while also making sure that each new lesson built on the previously taught grammar, vocabulary and topics. While developing the syllabus, the trainees were given feedback and advice by the facilitators on how to revise and improve it. While devising the teaching plan, presentations and handouts for each class, trainees were advised to take into consideration the importance and benefits of lifelong learning and language learning (Mackiewicz 2002).

Before the class, the trainees who taught the course had submitted a teaching plan to the facilitators and improved it according to the facilitators' comments. The trainees also sent their teaching materials to the facilitators for feedback. After the class, the trainees and the facilitators had a short meeting. The facilitators gave feedback, e.g. inquiring why the learner reacted in a certain way, analyzing the trainee's chosen teaching methods and what they should improve upon. However, the facilitators did not explicitly instruct the trainees but only suggested to use the knowledge acquired in the MNJJ 1 and MNJJ 2. The trainees taught in pairs: the main instructor prepared all the teaching materials and conducted the class; the assistant had a helping role in reading the example dialogues. In addition, other students enrolled in courses MNJJ 1 and MNJJ2 also observed and commented on the classes their colleagues taught during the two-week course.

The assessment of the students enrolled in the course PNJJK is not based on how 'well' the trainees taught Japanese in the intensive course, but to what extent they were able to resolve problems they faced in class, such as learner misunderstandings and questions, and to what extent they were able to gain a deeper understanding of the learning process.

6. FACILITATORS' FEEDBACK AND TRAINEES' IMPROVEMENT

As the concern with teaching methods and materials declined over the last few decades, aspiring language teachers had to develop their own teaching methods by blending aspects of various teaching methods. The facilitators indicated a path from theoretical knowledge to practical realization in class and paid attention to taking the role of facilitator due to the issues referred to in Johnson and Golombek (2020) as mentioned in the previous section.

Here is an example. Picture 1 is a slide used on the third day of the Japanese language course.

Picture 1: The student's slide on the third day of course

The slide contains the following content:

Dialogue:

Character 1: 1)Banana wo kaimasu ka?
ばななを かいますか?
(Kupuješ li bananu?)

Character 2: Hai, 1)Banana wo kaimasu.
はい、ばななを かいます。
(Da, kupujem bananu.)

Character 1: Iie, 2)Pan wo kaimasu.
いいえ、ぱんを かいます。
(Ne, kupujem kruh.)

Item List:

- 1)Banana 2)Pan
- 1)Kamera 2)Terebi
- 1)Chokoreto 2)Banana
- 1)Pan 2)Sushi

The picture shows a short dialogue with questions and answers. The learners are required to use the words from 1 to 4 on the right side of the list to make a similar conversation. However, the slide includes several problems. The slide includes too much information for the learners to focus on at the same time; i.e., Japanese and Roman letters, sentence structure and the task at hand. Hence, learners had difficulty in understanding what was required in the task. Another problem refers to the planned method of doing the drill. The task does not include options that would enable the learners to make voluntary utterances but only includes automatic replacement. After receiving feedback on the third day, the student who was the main instructor corrected and improved the structure of the slide on the ninth day of the 14-day course as shown below:

Picture 2: The slide on the ninth day of the course

A: 1) B-san wa 2) kuroachiajin desu ka?

B: Iie, watashi wa 3) surobeniajin desu.

A: 1) B-san wa 4) kuroachia no saruma ga suki desu ka?

B: Hai, suki desu.

A: Sō desu ka? 4) Kuroachia no saruma wa donna tabemono desu ka?

B: 4) kuroachia no saruma wa 5) oishii tabemono desu.

SMISLIMO RAZGOVOR!
1) Sugovornikovo ime
2) Nacionalnost 1
3) Nacionalnost 2
4) Nacionalno jelo
5) Pridjev koji opisuje nacionalno jelo



The slide on the ninth day excludes Japanese characters and shows only the Roman letter transcription of the conversation. The learners could concentrate on, firstly, listening to the sentences and understanding their meaning, and secondly, on practicing how to replace the highlighted words, with words represented by the illustrations. The conversation task was better executed than with the previous slide. On the ninth day the trainee divided the learners into breakout rooms and took time to let them think about the task. Consequently, the learner had the opportunity to think over the diverse conversations and to listen to conversations by other classmates.

The facilitators observed the following aspects of the trainees' teaching skills during the first class they taught that required further consideration and improvement for the trainees' following class, which was then done autonomously by the trainee:

- paying more attention to the thorough preparation of the teaching plan, easy-to-understand handouts and PowerPoint; sending the teaching materials on time to facilitators for revision
- better time management and supervision of planned activities during class
- connecting the new learning content with the previously introduced grammar and vocabulary
- devising and conducting more dialogue/speech exercises

- providing a summary of the taught content at the end of the class
- giving clearer instructions and explanations to the learners regarding the new grammar and exercises
- the pace of activities was too fast; not giving enough time to learners to solve the tasks
- encouraging the learners to speak more.

It should be emphasized that teachers of the PNJJK do not provide solutions to the trainees' problems in the intensive course. In the meeting after each class, the facilitators first let the trainees notice the problems and learner misunderstandings in class on their own, and then they discuss why it happened and how it could be avoided. The facilitators also helped the trainees reactivate and apply the knowledge they gained in MNJJ1 and MNJJ2. It can therefore be said that the trainees had autonomy in practice teaching. By conducting practice teaching trainees were autonomous in identifying a problem, discovering its cause and providing a solution.

7. EVALUATION OF THE SHORT COURSE

7.1. Findings from the trainee report

In this section we consider what the trainees gain by participating in the PNJJK course. Upon examining their final report, it has become evident that the most common difficulties the trainees experienced were connected to devising a teaching plan, handouts and exercises. This mainly referred to time constraints (starting too late with the preparation for the class) and deciding on the scope of the teaching content (what was necessary and what is not). Moreover, they also found difficulties in designing easy-to-understand handouts (too much information on a handout, the lack of clear instructions, what is important and what is not), devising the lesson and exercises so they would correlate with previously taught content (combining new content with previously taught grammar and vocabulary).

Likewise, time management was also highlighted as an issue since the trainees found it difficult to accurately predict and plan how long each activity would last, meaning they had difficulty in determining how long the explanation of new grammar, vocabulary and exercises would take and how long it would take for the learners to complete each exercise. This suggests that trainees should pay more attention to carefully simulating and devising

activities, taking into consideration the difficulty of the introduced content, learner motivation and language proficiency.

Regarding the issue of controlling the class and maintaining learner motivation, it can be observed that trainees believe to have performed well in that respect. They praised the learners, encouraged them to speak even when they made mistakes, keeping in mind that they are beginners, called them individually by their name, made time for each learner to practice and speak. They apparently tried to help the learners continue to learn individually even after the course was completed. At the end of the course, the trainees introduced several YouTube channels useful for learning Japanese language, culture and society, and also shared dictionary websites and websites with Japanese language exercises.

While it was observed that the trainees' skills improved in managing the course, building better teaching plans and controlling time, they had difficulties in devising new teaching/learning methods. The trainees had learned various teaching approaches, such as the audio-lingual method, communicative approach and modern learning methods, such as active learning and flip classroom as part of the MNJJ 1 and 2 courses. However, the intensive course was primarily based on the grammar-translation method, being the method the students (trainees) had experienced first-hand in their own Japanese language courses while studying in the undergraduate program.

The trainees relied predominantly on the method they had experienced, even though the facilitators encouraged them to use other teaching methods and approaches in the after-class meetings. Additionally, it seems that the trainees did not consider these methods, as no mention about the used teaching method in the class they had taught was found in the trainees' final reports. Therefore, this raises the concern of how to connect not only the trainees' experiences, but the knowledge they had learned in the graduate course and to implement it in teaching practice.

7.2. Findings from the learners' questionnaire

Once the two-week intensive course had finished, an anonymous questionnaire was sent to the learners, with the purpose of receiving feedback and insight from the learners about the course. The results of this questionnaire indicate that 13 of 14 participants thought that the trainees'

teaching style improved during the two-week course, while 1 participant answered that it has remained the same from the beginning. The learners did not give any further explanations on their perception of the trainees' improvement. In addition, all participants unanimously agreed that attending the course had lived up to their expectations and that they would like to participate again if the opportunity arises.

All 14 participants answered that the trainees sent the materials and handouts for each lesson in a regular and timely manner. Finally, with regard to what they would have liked to learn or practice more during the course, the most common answers were more writing (3) and speech exercises (3), learning about Japanese culture and society (2), more grammar drills (1), while the remaining 5 participants stated that the content was sufficient. Given this information, it could be worthwhile to consider conducting a language needs research analysis before the trainees devise and develop the syllabus or teaching plan for their class, so they could adjust the lesson content according to learners' needs and interests.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper discussed and examined the implementation and execution process of the course Practice Teaching of the Japanese Language and Culture (PNJJK) as part of the graduate program of Japanese studies in its first year since being established, along with the present situation of Japanese language teaching and learning in Croatia and the theoretical background of Japanese language teaching methodology and pedagogy. Furthermore, the approach of the teachers as facilitators in the practice teaching, who guide the trainees on how to actively identify, react and autonomously solve certain challenges and issues that they encountered while planning the class and teaching the learners in the classroom was also elaborated, demonstrating the growth of the trainees in their teaching and classroom management skills.

Teacher training is a didactic and pedagogical program. However, because of the practical aspect of it, it should be communicative enough for both facilitators and trainees so that the trainees can gain the ability to identify issues by themselves and to autonomously resolve them with the help of didactic and pedagogical knowledge of language teaching.

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SAŽETAK

Organizacija i izvođenje kolegija *Praksa u nastavi japanskog jezika i kulture*

Globalni trend sve većeg rasta broja učenika japanskog jezika ukazao je i na pojavu potrebe u Hrvatskoj za osnivanjem obrazovnih ustanova (osnovno, srednje i visoko obrazovanje; neformalno obrazovanje) za učenje japanskog jezika, a posljedično i obrazovanjem i stvaranjem nove generacije kvalificiranih mladih učitelja, s adekvatnom teorijskom i praktičnom pozadinom i znanjem japanske didaktike i pedagogije.

Cilj ovog rada je analizirati i opisati organizaciju i izvođenje kolegija *Praksa u nastavi japanskog jezika i kulture* na prvoj godini diplomskog studija Japanologije, osvrćući se i na izazove i ograničenja koja su proizašla zbog situacije s pandemijom bolesti Covid-19 i *online* izvođenja nastave. Nadalje, rad će također raspraviti i ulogu nastavnika kao moderatora/facilitatora, studenata kao praktikanta i polaznika kao učenika na intenzivnom dvotjednom online tečaju za građane, koji je dio gore spomenutog diplomskog kolegija. Na kraju, rad će se, na temelju rezultata i odgovara dobivenih iz ankete provedene na polaznicima tečaja (učenici), zatim saznanja iz izvješća samoevaluacije studenata (praktikanata) o obavljenoj praksi te evaluacije nastavnika, osvrnuti na poboljšanje znanja i vještina praktikanata na praksi.

Ključne riječi: edukacija nastavnika, japanski kao strani jezik, silabus, nastavni plan, podučavanje japanskog jezika, cjeloživotno učenje, autonomnost, facilitator, visokoškolsko obrazovanje