

STUDY ON THE LEVEL OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS OF STUDENTS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENT IN THE RESOURCE CENTRE NENA TEREZE IN PRIZREN



Co-funded
by the European Union



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Co-funded and implemented
by the Council of Europe

This publication was produced within the scope of the project “Building Capacity for Inclusion in Education – INCLUDE” with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors. Views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Council of Europe. © Council of Europe, October 2023. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions. No part of this publication may be translated, reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic (CD-ROM, internet, etc.) or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without the prior permission in writing from the Directorate of Communications (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int).

**Prepared by Marja MATERO
and Gazmend TAHIRAJ**

Cover image credits: Andrey Popov/shutterstock.com
All requests concerning the reproduction or translation of all or part of the document should be addressed to the Directorate of Communications. All other correspondence concerning this publication should be addressed to the Council of Europe Education Department, Co-operation and Capacity Building Division.
The Council of Europe Production Department (SPDP) is not responsible for its layout and content.

October 2023

Contents

ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	6
BACKGROUND	8
RESEARCH DESIGN	10
Methodological approach	10
Data collection	11
Limitations of the study	12
LITERATURE REVIEW	14
RESULTS	21
Results of students	23
Results of parents	26
Results of the education staff of the school	28
Other results	37
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	40
Conclusions	40
RECOMMENDATIONS	42
REFERENCES	46
ANNEX: TEACHERS' ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE	49

Acronyms

AI	Administrative Instruction
CID	Central Institute for the Deaf
CoE	Council of Europe
DHH	Deaf and hard of hearing
EU	European Union
FSDEK	Finnish Support to the Education Sector in Kosovo
IEP	Individualised Educational Plan
IT	Information Technology
INCLUDE	Building Capacity for Inclusive Education project
KAD	Kosovo Association for the Deaf
KPL	Kuuntelen-Puhun-Luen
KSL	Kosovar Sign Language
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
RC	Resource Centre
SEN	Special Education Needs
SL	Sign Language

Executive summary

During last 15 years, there have been robust efforts to promote bilingual education for deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students in Kosovo* in accordance with the curriculum. Despite many concrete actions for harnessing and developing methods of bilingual teaching being taken, different stakeholders have expressed growing concern about the unsatisfactory levels of learning and particularly of the reading and writing achievements of students. This study was conducted to gain an informed understanding of the situation at hand.

The key focus of the study was to obtain information on access to languages and language learning, as well as to obtain information on the levels of literacy among the DHH students in the Resource Centre (RC) Nena Tereze. Since there was a preliminary idea of the unsatisfactory levels of reading achievements of the students in the school, a reading skills test among students was conducted as part of the study. The test results supported the preliminary idea by showing that students tested do not have reading skills. Thus, the further aims were to navigate and address the root causes of the problem that may hinder DHH students from achieving satisfactory levels of academic competencies and to provide recommendations for stakeholders on how to improve the situation.

The goal was to gain information on the following five key areas that each contribute to the main objective which is to reach the level of achievements stated in the curriculum: 1) Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners; 2) Literacy skills and multilingual literacies of DHH learners; 3) Teachers' and classroom assistants' practices when interacting with DHH learners; 4) Learning environments and materials in and outside school; and 5) Understanding of the routes to literacy, language abilities, and high academic achievements of DHH learners.

This qualitative study used an ethnographic research approach, and data was collected by using different methods: the reading skills test for students, focus group interviews at the school, interviews with the principal, an official from the MESTI and representatives of the Kosovo Association for the Deaf (KAD). In addition, observations were made in the classrooms and an additional survey for teachers was conducted. The data was collected during the field trip in May 2023.

The reading skills test showed that none of the 14 students tested from years 4 to 12 manage to read and understand even simple sentences. The main reasons for this are teachers' lack of sign language and pedagogical skills, lack of materials used in teaching, lack of usage of SL interpreters, and lack of sign language as a subject for DHH students.

The results of this study will be used by the MESTI and other stakeholders in improving the DHH education in Kosovo.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on the status and is in line with the UNSCR 1244 and the ECJ opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

Introduction

This study is part of the joint EU/CoE programme “Building Capacity for Inclusion in Education – INCLUDE”. The overall objective of the INCLUDE project is to improve access to quality education of students from disadvantaged groups in pre-primary, primary and secondary education - in line with the Beneficiary’s domestic policies and priorities and Council of Europe standards and practices. One of the specific objectives of the project is to strengthen the capacity of the Kosovo education system to improve participation of and support services for children with special education needs in pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

The Resource Centre Nena Tereze in Prizren provides education for the deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) students. During the last 15 years, the school has been supported in many ways to improve the quality of education for DHH students. Training on sign language, bilingual education, and teaching strategies for DHH education have been provided and the school has received sign language interpreters and class assistants to support students and teachers in the classroom. Since 2016, a sign language instructor has been training the educational staff of the RC on Kosovo Sign Language.

Despite these efforts, the learning achievements of DHH students have not improved, and different stakeholders have expressed their growing concern about these unsatisfactory achievements. Therefore, this study was needed to assess the existing situation and find reasons for the low level of achievements particularly in literacy skills of DHH students in the context of the school.

The main aims of the study were:

- 1) to obtain information on access to languages and language learning.
- 2) to obtain information on the levels of literacy among the DHH students; and navigate and address the root causes of the problem that may hinder DHH students from achieving satisfactory levels of academic competencies.
- 3) to provide recommendations for the stakeholders on how to improve the DHH education in Kosovo.

In addition, the study aimed to throw light upon ‘best practices’ found in the special school of RC Nena Tereze that enable higher achievements and to highlight any existing tensions between everyday interactional practices and policies that promote inclusive education, to propose actions for accessible and inclusive education and to create new perspectives for the development of education for DHH learners.

The goal was to gain information on the following five key areas that each contribute to the main objective which is to reach the level of achievements stated in the curriculum:

- 1) Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners
- 2) Literacy skills and multilingual literacies of DHH learners
- 3) Teachers' and classroom assistants' practices when interacting with DHH learners
- 4) Learning environments and materials in and outside school and
- 5) Understandings of the routes to literacy, language abilities, and high academic achievements of DHH learners.

This qualitative study used an ethnographic research approach, and data was collected by using different methods: the literacy skills test for students, focus group interviews at the school, interviews with the principal and one official from the MESTI and representatives of the Kosovo Association for the Deaf. In addition, observations were made in five classrooms and an online teachers' survey was conducted. The data was collected during the field trip in May 2023.

To assess the preliminary idea of unsatisfactory levels of reading achievements, the reading skills of 14 students from grades 4 to 12 were tested. The results showed that all tested students are unable to read and understand even simple sentences. In order to navigate the root causes of the problem, data was collected during the field trip. Focus group interviews with 11 students, 11 parents, 7 teachers, 3 classroom assistants, 2 sign language (SL) interpreters, a SL instructor and interviews with the principal, a MESTI official and 2 members of the Kosovo Association for the Deaf members were organised. Visits to classrooms were paid to observe classroom practices, and an online survey for teachers was conducted.

The results will be used by MESTI and other stakeholders in developing and improving the education of DHH students in Kosovo.

Background

The Resource Centre Nena Tereze in Prizren is one of the five former special schools which were transformed to function also as RCs in Kosovo. The transformation process started in 2007 with the support of the project Finnish Support to the Education Sector in Kosovo (FSDEK) II. Later, the work of RCs was regulated by the Law on Pre-University Education in 2011 and by Administrative Instruction No. 23/2013 which indicates the two main functions of RCs: a special school and Resource Centre which provides support to mainstream schools in Kosovo.

The duties of special schools in RCs include: the provision of special educational needs (SEN) programmes, teaching and rehabilitation services for children with disabilities; the preparation of individualised education plans (IEPs) for students; co-operation with parents and relevant institutions; the provision of accommodation for students in dormitories; the organisation of activities outside the school; and provision of daily meals for students in the RC. The duties of Resource Centres include the provision of supporting services to regular schools related to the teaching and learning of students with SEN. These services are mainly provided by itinerant teachers.

The RC Nena Tereze is the only school in Kosovo that is specialised in the education of deaf and hard of hearing students (DHH). In addition, there are two attached classes for DHH students: one in Elena Gjika school in Pristina and the other in Rexhep Elmazi school in Gjilan, and there are also students with DHH included in mainstream settings.

During the last 15 years, many efforts have taken place to improve the quality of DHH education in Kosovo. The Law on Pre-University Education (2011) and the Administrative Instruction (2013) for resource centres give the legal framework for also DHH education. The Kosovo Association for the Deaf (KAD) in collaboration with the MESTI have trained sign language instructors and class assistants. As a result, 15 deaf sign language trainers and school assistants were certificated by MESTI in 2015. The first itinerant teachers to support mainstream schools were hired in 2007.

The Kosovo Association for the Deaf in collaboration with the MESTI published the Guideline for Inclusive Education, bilingualism and sign language for children with hearing impairments in 2019¹. The guideline provides a comprehensive overview on the current education of students with DHH in Kosovo, modalities on how to proceed in developing and improving of DHH education; and guidance for schools, teachers, and parents on the specific needs of DHH students. (MESTI, 2019.)

The right of DHH children to sign language is stipulated in the Law on Pre-university Education (article 43): "Children and students who use sign language as their first language should be offered teaching in sign language." The language of instruction in the Nena Tereze school is sign language (MESTI, 2019.)

¹ Guidelines for inclusive education, bilingualism and sign language for hard of hearing children

The goals of bilingual education for students with hearing impairments as indicated in the Guideline for Inclusive Education, bilingualism and sign language for children with hearing impairments (MESTI, 2019) as follows:

- To enable children with hearing impairments to be linguistically competent.
- To provide access to a wide curriculum.
- To enable good literacy skills; and
- To offer students with hearing impairments a positive sense of their identity.

According to the Guideline, the education of DHH children in Kosovo faces the following challenges:

- Lack of data for DHH children, which causes problems in planning and budgeting for resources and efficient services which are based on the needs of DHH children.
- Lack of staff and resources for sign language, and experts who can work on designing curricula and texts in sign language.
- Limited budget which is visible generally in the field of education and particularly with children from marginalised groups who require a lot of human resources, assistive devices, and specific didactic teaching tools.
- Limited budget for staff employment, services, and goods.
- Poor quality of services and education.
- Lack of professionals.
- Lack of knowledge of Deaf education methodologies and SL skills among teachers.
- Lack of co-operation with similar schools in other countries.

In the RC Nena Tereze staff have received much in-service training on sign language, bilingualism and methodologies for DHH education. The services at the school have improved since sign language interpreters, class assistants and an SL instructor have been hired. Currently the staff working with students consist of the principal, 24 teachers, 2 SL interpreters, 3 class assistants, one SL instructor, one psychologist, 3 educators and 4 nurses. Many of them have been working in the school for decades.

Students in the school come from different parts of Kosovo and many of them are accommodated during school time in the school dormitory. During the last 10 years enrolment in the school has decreased since most parents send their children with DHH to the mainstream schools nearer to home. Currently, there are 34 students and nearly one third of them are hearing students with special educational needs due to for example autism or intellectual disabilities.

The general curriculum is used for the DHH students in the RC, Individualised Educational Plans are prepared for students and the study books used are the same as those in all mainstream schools. Students at the school do not sit the national exams.

Despite all efforts to improve the quality of education in the school, students do not learn to read and write. Reading is a fundamental skill fundamental for success in all academic areas and students who experience difficulty in reading will likely also experience difficulty in academic subject areas (Rose, S. et al. 2022). This study aimed to find reasons why students remain illiterate and find solutions what to do.

Research design

This qualitative study was conducted in the Resource Center Nena Tereze in Prizren.

The key aims of the study were:

- 1) to obtain information on access to languages and language learning, as well as
- 2) to obtain information on the levels of literacy among the DHH students; and to navigate and address the root causes of the problem that may hinder DHH students from achieving satisfactory levels of academic competencies; and
- 3) to provide recommendations for the stakeholders on how to improve the DHH education in Kosovo.

In addition, the study aimed to propose actions for accessible education and to create new perspectives for the development of education for DHH learners; to throw light upon 'best practices' found in the school of RC Nena Tereze that enable higher achievements; and to highlight any existing tensions between everyday interactional practices and policies that promote inclusive education.

The goal was to get information on the following key areas that each contribute to the main objective which is to reach the level of achievements stated in the curriculum:

- 1) Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners;
- 2) Literacy skills and multilingual literacies of DHH learners;
- 3) Teachers' and classroom assistants' practices when interacting with DHH learners;
- 4) Learning environments and materials in and outside school; and
- 5) Understandings of the routes to literacy, language abilities, and high academic achievements of DHH learners.

These five areas were the topics in focus group interviews. Semi-structured questions related to these topics were prepared for each focus group interview.

Methodological approach

This qualitative study used an ethnographic research approach. The study draws on different types of data, and the usage of multiple data which strengthens the trustworthiness of the study. For example, while interviews give information about what participants think they do, neutral observations yield information on the concrete, everyday actions and orientations.

In this study, data was collected by using various methods: the literacy skills test for students, focus group interviews at the school, interviews with the principal and official from the MESTI

and representatives of the Kosovo Association for the Deaf, observations in the classrooms and an online teachers' survey.

The primary focus of the analysis was on a student data set which included student interviews and a literacy skills test to find out the reading and writing competencies of the students.

The analysis of this student data set served as the starting point for the overall study, and other data was to clarify the reasons why the students did or did not reach the expected competencies through education.

Data collection

The data was collected during the fieldtrip in May 2023. The data was collected using the following methods:

- 7 focus group interviews of students, teachers, other educational staff (interpreters, classroom assistants and SL instructor) and other staff members (educators and nurses);
- Interviews with the key stakeholders (the principal of the RC, a MESTI official and representatives of the Kosovo Association of the Deaf);
- Observations in the classroom / school;
- Literacy skills test for students;
- Online survey for teachers and educators.

The total number of participants in focus groups and individual interviews were 11 students and 28 adults.

Focus groups were as follows:

Students group A:	6 Deaf students from grades 9 to 12
Students group B:	5 Deaf students from grades 4, 6, 7 and 9
Parents group A:	6 Deaf parents
Parents group B:	5 hearing parents (one with a child with autism)
Teachers group:	7 teachers
Staff group A:	2 sign language interpreters, 1 SL instructor and 3 classroom assistants (deaf)
Staff group B:	3 educators and 2 nurses

Interviews with the key stakeholders aimed at gaining information on the current needs and availability of resources for supporting both the educational staff and the pupils at the school. The principal was interviewed at the school, the MESTI official and the 2 representatives of the KAD were interviewed in Pristina.

All interviews were transcribed, and analysis of the captured data was combined from the focus group and individual interviews by following the five key areas of the study.

Fourteen students participated to the literacy skills test. The aim was to test students for their fluency in reading and reading comprehension. The test and results are described in the following chapter. Observations were made in 4 classrooms, and they are reported in the following chapters.

During the data collection through interviews and class observations, it was noticed that the school and teachers are using the general curriculum and the same books as in mainstream schools for hearing students. Teachers reported that they have prepared IEPs for students.

The online Teachers' survey

The online teachers' survey was designed as an additional tool to include more people in the study and to gather more information about teachers' and educators' perceptions of the teaching and learning process and the achievements of deaf and hard of hearing students.

In the form of a questionnaire, (see Annex) the survey consisted of 30 quantitative and 2 open-ended questions. The questions were designed to collect information on the perception of teachers and educators about the school infrastructure, school curriculum, learning materials, sign language skills of teachers, achievements of students and collaboration with parents.

The questionnaire was constructed in such a way that it had both multiple answer questions with the Likert scale and open-ended questions. The idea behind the open-ended questions was to collect more in-depth information regarding the challenges and ideas for improvement of education of deaf and hard of hearing students.

The link for the online questionnaire was sent to the school principal and 22 teachers and 3 educators. Itinerant teachers were not part of the study. The questionnaire was open for answers for two weeks. Twenty responds were received including teachers, educators and the school principal.

Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study were as follows:

- 1) In the selection of the sample of students to be tested in Albanian written language it was not possible to randomly select the students because of the small number of deaf students in the school. The sample was selected from grades 4 to 12 to examine the skills of different aged deaf students to be as representative as possible.

- 2) The short time for collecting the data did not allow for more examinations or the evaluation of different academic skills of DHH students and class observations during the teaching and learning process.
- 3) There was no time or resources to go deeper in the personal interviews with teachers, students, and parents to acquire more facts about the situation and the factors underlying the challenges and poor academic achievements of deaf students in the school. This might have had the effect of not giving detailed specific recommendations that are related to the complex academic interventions for the improvement of results of deaf students. However, the cross validation of the data received by different participants of the study and class observations will shed enough light onto the issues that seemed problematic in the education of deaf children.
- 4) Due to the researchers' lack of sign language skills, communication during focus group discussions with deaf students and deaf adults as well as observations in the classrooms were dependent on the SL interpretations. This hindered direct understanding of what was said in SL and to evaluate directly the skills of teachers in SL. However, cross examination of interviewees and class observations were made to gain a better understanding of issues of importance.

Literature review

The academic achievement of deaf and hard-of-hearing is the result of a complex interplay of many factors, including those that are intrinsic to students themselves, such as expressive and receptive language abilities, family characteristics, and students' experiences inside and outside school. (Marschark et al, 2015)

The focus of the literature review is on examining factors that are related to the readiness of DHH children to learn a written language: the quality of hearing loss, family factors, early acquisition of a language, access to bilingual education and teaching practices and methodology for DHH education. The review recognises the importance of the Guideline for Inclusive Education, bilingualism and sign language for children with hearing impairments (MESTI, 2019) as a reference since it provides information and guides tailored to the Kosovo context.

Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners

The type and quality of the hearing loss determines the student's opportunities for acquiring spoken language, since the degree of hearing loss varies from mild hearing loss to deafness. Most students with hearing impairment have mild or moderate hearing loss. They can hear with the help of hearing aids or cochlear implants, and they usually communicate with spoken language, supported by lipreading, signed speech and supported signs which may be used in teaching to support understanding. Hard of hearing people mostly identify with the hearing population. (MESTI, 2019; Savolainen, A. et al 2020.)

Deaf students mostly have a profound hearing loss, which means they have very little or no hearing (MESTI, 2019). Deafness is perceived differently in deaf culture than in hearing culture. According to the sociocultural point of view, deaf people represent a cultural and linguistic minority, and deafness is not considered a disability. Deaf people call themselves sign language users or deaf and not hearing impaired. The mother tongue or first language of the deaf is sign language and they learn a written language as a second language. (Takala, M., & Sume, H., 2015; Tupi, E. 2019, Valteri 2023.)

Since much of the learning inside and outside of school is mediated by language, students need to have a fully developed first language to experience success in school. (Dostal, H. & al. 2017.) In order to gain a fully developed first language, the interaction and language development in the first years of life are very important for child's cognitive and social development and later gaining literacy and academic skills. (Tupi, E. 2019; Savolainen, A. 2020.)

Studies of sign language acquisition in children show that sign language development is comparable to spoken language development, and that early fluency in sign language leads to equivalent word and sentence level milestones and pragmatic skills. (Swanwick, R. 2016.)

The family background of a deaf child plays an important role in early acquisition of the first language. If a deaf child is born into a family with deaf parents, the child has access to sign language since birth. However, only a small number of deaf children are born to deaf parents. (Marschark et al, 2015; Tupi, E. 2019; Savolainen, A. 2020.) Most deaf children are born to hearing parents whose mother tongue is a spoken language, and because of their hearing losses, DHH children's access to spoken language is limited. Thus, the development of sign language fluency for these deaf children is problematic and most of them arrive at school with significant delays in sign language development. (Swanwick, R. 2016; Knoors & Marschark, 2012.)

Hearing parents of a deaf child do not usually have previous knowledge about sign language, and they are unaware of what learning sign language would mean for both deaf children and their families. In addition, there still exist false assumptions that learning sign language can hinder the development of spoken language, and families are often provided with the belief that they should choose only a sign language or a spoken language instead of being able to use both. However, sign language should not be considered an alternative should speech training fail, which would mean losing valuable time in a sensitive language acquisition period, but sign language should be taught to a Deaf child as early as possible. Parents must be provided with proper information about the language development of a deaf child and parents need to be trained in sign language to support their deaf children to learn sign language as early as possible. (Tupi, E. 2019.)

A bilingual approach combines sign language with the written/spoken language of the surrounding community (e.g., Albanian). Early acquisition of sign language and bilingualism is strongly connected to overall cognitive, academic and language development since it prevents the possibility of delays in cognitive and language development and supports of a spoken/written language. In addition, sign language and the development of bilingualism preserves the child's social and emotional development, and the use of SL reduces frustration in young children by providing them with a means to express themselves. (MESTI, 2019.)

Without support and resources to learn sign language, a deaf child might grow up without any language which can have long-lasting impact on all aspects in life (e.g. social, mental and economic well-being, access to education, employment and society). (Tupi, E. 2019.)

Literacy skills (reading and writing) and multilingual literacies of DHH learners

The literacy skills of deaf children generally lag behind those of their hearing peers (Rudner et al. 2015). Learning to read is strongly influenced by children's different backgrounds, and a strong foundation in one's mother tongue or first language supports learning to read (Mayer & Trezek 2014), and this is also the case among deaf children. The knowledge of sign language predicts

a deaf student's ability to learn to read. Awareness of sign language phonology and language structure seems to help a deaf student with SL in the process of learning to read when he or she can compare differences between SL and written language on her/his phonetic awareness. (MESTI 2019; Savolainen, A. 2020; Rudner et al. 2015; Mayer & Trezek 2014.)

Students with DHH have a variety of language histories and communication preferences which have different implications for literacy development at the school.

- 1) Some DHH students learn Sign Language as their first language, and then learn written and/or spoken language as a second language at home or in school. Since they have a strong foundation in SL, they are capable of developing literacy skills like their hearing peers particularly when given access to the curriculum and language of the classroom.
- 2) Other DHH students learn spoken language as their first language using residual hearing and hearing with hearing aid or cochlear implant and have fully developed spoken language as their first language when they arrive at school. They may still need additional support e.g. with vocabulary and syntax since they may have difficulties in hearing clearly enough words, sounds of words, or even sounds that change meaning of the word.
- 3) Some of these students still do not have sufficient access to a spoken language to naturally acquire it as a first language. They may experience a language delay since they have not been exposed to sign language and thus, they have not yet had enough access to any language to construct a foundation for communication and learning.”
(Dostal, H. & al. 2017.)

The main recommendation from an international conference of deaf education 2010 is as follows: “Bilingual education is the only way for deaf children to gain equal opportunities and allowing them to become full citizens in their own right. Becoming bilingual in the national sign language and the written language of one's country of residence is a fundamental right for deaf children. National sign languages are the mother tongues of deaf people and the only language they can acquire fully and effortlessly. To function in society, it is essential for deaf children to become proficient in the respective (written) language of the country. Therefore, meaningful bilingualism must be ensured in education as early as possible and throughout the course of the whole educational path, including Lifelong Learning programmes.” (The World Federation of the Deaf. 2011.)

Children with hearing impairment must be provided education in the languages, modes and means of communication most appropriate for the individual and in environments that maximise academic and social development. The education system, teachers, educators, and parents are responsible for ensuring maximum academic and social development, which means that a child with hearing impairment should have a bilingual environment and education in the early stages. (MESTI, 2019.)

Sign language supports the learning of spoken language since the child can verify the meaning of new words by using relevant signs or by asking for clarification in SL. When the child is bilingual, he or she may choose whichever language he or she thinks is easier, more convenient, or more effective for communicating with others or learning new things. (MESTI, 2019.)

Quality education for DHH students involves a range of elements to ensure effective learning, communication, and overall development. These elements include access to the language of instruction, qualified teachers with good skills in SL and bilingual education, access to the curriculum through individualised educational plans, collaboration with teachers, specialists and parents, support services for the individual needs of a student, access to technology (e.g. educational software), and assistive devices as needed. For curriculum to be effectively implemented, it must be flexible and accessible to deaf students. (Mapepa, P. Et al 2018.)

The high rate of illiteracy of deaf people can be explained by the wrong medium of education not succeeding in providing required pedagogical support for deaf students to acquire strong literacy skills. (Tupi, E. 2019). According to Stronge (2018), high-quality, well-prepared professionals are the key to effective instruction for DHH students, and all teachers require expertise in professional knowledge, instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment, learning environment, and professionalism. (Stronge, J. h. et al 2018.). Teachers of the deaf need a strong knowledge of deafness, speech acoustics, language acquisition, and the science of reading. (Scheetz, N.A et al 2008), and they must master sign language and have good knowledge of bilingual education. (Hartman, M. C. et al 2023)

Language and literacy development are essential to educational programming for DHH children (Pizzo, I. & Chivers, A. 2019). Reading is a fundamental skill that underlies success in all academic areas. Students who have trouble reading likely will also have trouble in academic subject areas. (Rose, S. et al. 2022.)

The assessment of language proficiency and literacy skills is a challenging task since DHH children often use a wide variety of languages and/or communication systems in different surroundings such as their home, school, and community. The language used at school, at home and in the community may all be different. In daily life, a child may use spoken language, sign language, signed spoken language or a constructed sign system, which borrow features from an official sign language but is not one or some combination of them. Even when children use a conventional language, they may use it inconsistently across different contexts. "This unpredictability in language use may leave gaps in a child's linguistic repertoire, making it hard to establish the primary language to be used during the assessment administration or even which languages should be included in the assessment". (Pizzo, L. & Chilvers, A. 2019.)

There is no single method for teaching students with hearing impairments because learning to read is greatly influenced by, among other things, how much hearing can be utilised in learning. The more severe the degree of hearing loss, the more challenging it is to distinguish the different sounds of spoken language and the more difficult it is to learn spoken and written language by hearing (Savolainen, A. et al. 2020).

Students who have residual hearing benefit from assistive devices such as hearing aids and cochlear implants and their learning to speak, read and write can be like that of hearing students. Still, it must be remembered that they have their individual needs which need to be met in the teaching. Modifications to the learning environment must be properly planned (acoustics, lighting, use of lipreading etc.).

For deaf students learning to read and write is more challenging since their language is sign language. Therefore, bilingual education is highly important since it promotes the development of sign language and spoken/written languages simultaneously and facilitates the transfer of skills between sign language and written language.

However, the experience of learning to write among DHH children is unique in that many of them are coming to the task of learning to write without a fully acquired first language. This reduces the linguistic resources needed to craft syntactically accurate sentences and presents teachers of the deaf with the need to approach writing instruction in a way that accounts for language delay and deprivation. (Wolbers, K. A. & al. 2020.)

Deaf students access information and the world through visual and tactile means thus, visual strategies play a significant role in deaf education and teaching reading and writing to deaf students. Anything that is language-based, whether oral or in print, should be supported with visual aids, such as pictures, demonstrations, graphics videos and multimedia resources, to enhance comprehension and vocabulary development. Visual support helps bridge the gap between the visual nature of sign language and the written language. For example, in teaching complex verb tenses, photos can be used to illustrate actions, and in highlighting concepts graphs or pictures help students' learning. (Yuknis, C et al. 2017.)

Teachers should plan properly how they present and organise visuals. If a teacher speaks while showing visual images it can confuse DHH students, who must split their attention, looking at the interpreter or lipreading the teacher and examining the image at the same time. It is good to give time for students to view visuals before you discuss them. This way students are likely to be more engaged with the lesson. (Yuknis, C et al. 2017.)

"A few more strategies to make the classroom more visual are e.g. use of gestures, props, or role plays to illustrate processes or ideas; adding pictorial or graphic representations to text content, creating videos to show how ideas connect, provision of graphic organisers or mind maps, use of colours to code concepts and ideas." (Yuknis, C et al. 2017.)

Herring T. J. & Woolsey, M.J. (2020) recommend three instructional strategies for teachers who teach DHH students: choral responding, response cards, and peer tutoring. These three strategies have been shown to increase active student responding in classrooms among hearing students and they can be easily adapted to the needs of DHH students.

Choral response and response cards are techniques that can be used to encourage the whole class to respond in unison to questions of the teacher together. They are used when answers are short. In choral responses students show their responses to the teacher's question (e.g. which is the right answer? A... B... C...) by hand signs. Response cards are cards, signs, or other items all students in a class hold up simultaneously to display their responses to questions or problems presented by the teacher.

In peer tutoring students are paired for tutoring roles - the tutor, and the tutee. Halfway of the tutoring period roles are switched and the tutor becomes the tutee. Tutors provide immediate feedback on their tutees' responses. To account for discrepancies between academic levels of a peer tutoring pair, instructional material on flashcards can be used. Answers to academic prompts (spelling words, definitions etc.) are written or printed on the back of the flashcard for the tutor to refer to it and provide instructional feedback to the tutee even if the material is above the tutor's academic level. For deaf students, peer tutoring materials can be adopted by creating a cardholder that allows the tutor to use both hands to communicate in SL, while keeping the peer tutoring cards upright. Usage of peer tutoring among DHH students have demonstrated overall increases in academic responding, an improvement in reading and math skills, and physical activity.

Assistive technology plays a valuable role in supporting deaf children's reading and writing skills. Tools like captioning, screen readers, speech-to-text software, and visual aids help bridge the gap between written language and sign language, facilitating access to information and promoting independent learning.

Captioning is a form of assistive technology which is an obvious strategy for teachers who work with DHH students. Captions turn what is said into written text. They are shown on a screen or device so you can read what is being said. The captions have the potential to improve literacy and language skills amongst DHH students since they provide students with access to the words that are being spoken and important sounds that are part of the video. (Cairns, K. et al. 2014; Yuknis, C et al. 2017.)

Research has demonstrated that classroom captioning can increase the comprehension of spoken material for DHH students to understand the lesson content better and better still to summarise the content of the lesson. It may also generate an increased sense of inclusion and participation in the classroom for DHH students, who are better able to keep up with the pace of the lesson. The impact of this could lead to enhanced academic performance, but also to a more inclusive classroom environment with students able to participate more fully in the classroom as they can understand what is happening. (Cairns, K. et al, 2014.)

Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) is instruction that is presented on a computer to illustrate a concept through attractive animation, sound and demonstration. It is an interactive instructional technique in which a computer is used to present the instructional material and monitor the learning that takes place. It uses a combination of text, graphic, sound and video in enhancing the learning process. (Adigun, O. T. 2020.)

Learning materials for deaf students should be made simple and equipped with multi representation. With the development of ICT, multi representation has become easy and inexpensive (Suarsana, I. M. 2021).

The effective and consistent use of hearing technology, including remote microphone systems, for children who use listening and spoken language can also help to overcome the learning challenges inherent in large and noisy mainstream classrooms. (Hartman, M. C. et al. 2023.)

Classrooms for the DHH students need to be stimulated with facilities and effective instructional techniques that could compensate for the loss from lack of hearing. The conventional teaching strategy (chalk-talk/sign) may present additional challenges to the teaching-learning process. (Adigun, O. T. 2020.)

Methods for learning to read:

In Finland, the synthetic KÄTS method (letter-sound-syllable-word method) is used a lot in learning to read, where teaching to read starts with learning letter-sound correspondence and progresses through syllables to reading words and sentences. Since hearing impairment can make it difficult to hear sounds, teaching should also use the written form and/or the finger alphabet. In addition to the synthetic method, many hearing-impaired students also benefit from analytical whole-word methods, such as the KPL method. The method is based on the visual recognition of the word as a whole.

Visuality is the most essential modality of learning to read for a deaf sign language student. A deaf student learns to recognise the letters of the written language by encoding them into visual finger alphabet. Finger alphabets are sign language hand shapes that express the sounds and letters of spoken languages. The mutual connection between the written letters and the finger alphabet is strengthened with a lot of different exercises in writing of a finger alphabet and forming a finger alphabet from a written letter. From letters, you gradually progress to different whole word methods, where you start to practice recognising word figures from words in the basic form consisting of a few letters. The student practices fingerspelling the word corresponding to the sign and writes it in letters. After this, it is still important to spell the word with the correct sign. Repetitions of practicing fingerspelling and writing words and awareness of signs corresponding to words support the acquisition of words. From short words you progress to longer words, in which case the student is required to remember a larger set of letters. (Savolainen, A. et al. 2020.)

In the CID method, the learned letters and their corresponding sounds are combined into syllables and the learned syllables into words. The teaching consists of versatile repetition exercises that include the following steps: pronunciation, lip reading, listening and writing. All stages also include memory exercises. Fingerspelling helps recall the sound corresponding to the letter and supports their possible production as separate sounds. With the help of fingerspelling and various writing exercises, touch, position sense and visual sensations are obtained at the same time. Different methods and approaches strongly support each other. (Siiskonen & Vuorinen 2004, 15.)

The KPL whole word method is used especially for those students who have challenges in acquiring the Finnish language or learning to read. For students with DHH, the KPL whole word method is usually used in pre- and primary education or as support for learning to read. The KPL vocabulary can be used to develop the student's vocabulary and introduce the student to written Finnish language. Vocabulary words are learned to understand, produce gestures and /or speak, recognise, read and write. You can also practice fingerspelling and lipreading the words. (Savolainen, A. et al 2020.)

Results

The preliminary idea of the study was the unsatisfactory levels of reading achievements of students in the RC Nena Tereza and formed the basis of this study. Students' reading skills in the study were assessed and students participated in the focus group interviews where their literacy practices and language use were discussed. Before coming to the discussions about students' everyday practices and language use and the results of the other focus group interviews, the results of the reading skills assessment are presented.

The assessment of reading skills of deaf and hard of hearing students

The assessment tool used in the assessment of reading fluency and comprehension of deaf and hard of hearing students in the Resource Centre Nena Tereze in Prizren is a group reading test (Räsänen, P. & Tahiraj, G. 2008). This instrument is based on the test battery (Reading Fluency task) developed by Woodcock & Johnson (1989) in English language. The adapted version in Finnish, LUKSU, is developed by Niilo Maki Institute (NMI) in Finland in cooperation with the University of Jyväskylä. Before it was used in Kosovo the test had to be modified into the Kosovar context.

The assessment of reading skills measures the fluency of reading and to some extent also speed of reading and reading comprehension. Students using this test had to read simple sentences, such as "Iron is soft". After reading the sentence the student needed to tick a box whether the sentence was true or false. The sentences were so simple that students did not need to think for long, whether it was right or wrong. There were 70 sentences in the assessment tool and when used with hearing students they had 3 minutes to read as many sentences as they could.

But, during the administration of the test with deaf and hard of hearing students we gave 15 minutes time and we explained that they don't have to complete all 70 sentences, but simply to read carefully as many sentences as they could and select the right answer. We instructed students that for those sentences they are not sure they understand correctly, not to fill them, as filling them wrongly would deduct one point from the final score. Each correct answer of the item in the test would bring one point out of total of 70 points. If one item is filled wrongly that would deduct one point from the final score. This was done as a measure to control guessing of answers.

The administration of the test with deaf and hard of hearing students was done by using a Sign Language interpreter. All the instructions before and during the test were provided in sign language.

A total of 14 students from grade 4 to 12 participated in the test. It was not possible to select the students randomly from the list as there were only 30 students in the school and some of the

students had other disabilities such as autism and other intellectual disabilities. The aim of the study was to measure reading skills of deaf and hard of hearing students.

Results of the reading test of deaf and hard of hearing students

Nr.	Students	Grade	Number of correct answers	Number of wrong answers	Total of scored points out of total 70
1	N.N	12	0	0	0
2	N.N	12	2	4	0
3	N.N	11	12	4	8
4	N.N	11	5	3	2
5	N.N	11	3	3	0
6	N.N	11	0	1	0
7	N.N	10	0	0	0
8	N.N	9	11	14	0
9	N.N	8	3	4	0
10	N.N	8	2	3	0
11	N.N	7	0	1	0
12	N.N	7	1	0	1
13	N.N	6	0	0	0
14	N.N	4	3	1	2

GRAPH 1. Results of the reading test of deaf and hard of hearing students of Nena Tereze Resource Centre in Prizren

As can be seen from Graph 1, the results of reading of deaf and hard of hearing students are extremely poor. From a total of 14 students who participated in the test only one student, nr. 3 in the list from the grade 11 managed to reach 8 points by ticking correctly 12 sentences and 4 sentences wrongly. Even this positive result doesn't show that the student is able to read and understand what is read as the test is constructed in that way that those who acquire the reading skill very easily decide if statements in simple sentences are true or false.

The 70 statements of the reading test used in the evaluation of deaf and hard of hearing students are very simple and easy to understand once you have acquired reading skills. However, in order to do the test correctly students needed to understand what they were reading which was difficult for all the deaf students who were part of the evaluation. For example, there were simple statements such as 'The iron is soft' or 'Flies fly' and students had to decide if the statement was true or false. Deaf and hard of hearing students were not able to read and understand those simple statements.

Deaf and hard of hearing students who participated in the evaluation looked surprised and puzzled when the test was delivered to them. Most of them didn't understand the test and wanted to give up at the very beginning, but after supporting, they took more time to try to read the sentences and do the test. All students gave up the test within ten minutes.

The results show that deaf and hard of hearing students after 12 years in the school have not managed to learn to read and communicate in the written Albanian language. They cannot read and understand simple sentences. In the same test administered with hearing students of 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades children scored correctly from 20 to 70 sentences.

This is a sign that the methodology used to teach reading and writing to deaf and hard of hearing students has failed. This failure must be seen and analysed from different perspectives such as the teaching and learning methodology used by teachers, the way of communication and language used during the teaching and interaction with students, the equipment and materials used in the teaching process and also family factors and collaboration with parents.

Observations in the classrooms and material obtained during interviews showed that the main factor of very poor results in reading and writing skills of students are results of the poor sign language skills of teachers and a lack of sign language as a subject for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Results of students

The aim of student focus group interviews was to gain an understanding of pupils' experiences and views on the goals, learning, everyday practices, and prevailing assumptions and expectations related to learning.

There was a total of 11 deaf students from grades 4 to 12 in two focus groups. The original plan was to have two focus groups, one for deaf students and one for hard of hearing students. Since all students considered themselves deaf and have sign language as their language of communication, the focus groups were interviewed using the same study questions. Sign language interpreters were used in focus group interviews. The results of both groups have been combined below.

Most of the students started their school in Nena Tereze from the 1st grade and some of them have already been at school for 11 years. As the results of the reading comprehension test of the study showed, no students can read or write in the written Albanian language.

In both focus group interviews all students were very active. They expressed openly their experiences of learning and they were analytical in finding reasons for their very low learning achievements. Students were frustrated that they and their concerns about the quality of education in the school were not taken seriously.

They are willing and eager to learn and in particular to learn written Albanian. They are ashamed of not being able to communicate with people who use a spoken language because they cannot express themselves even in writing. This also has had an impact on their self-esteem. As one of the students expressed: *"I'll be ashamed to show my children (in the future) that I do not know how to read and write."* Another student stated that *"We are having a stigma... we want to be equal to hearing people."*

Although the students were very critical of the quality of the school's teaching, they enjoy being at school because of friendships and social aspects.

Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners

Language acquisition in early childhood was easy for the children of deaf families since they were able to learn a language and communicate with others. The language acquisition for children from hearing families was very challenging since they did not learn any language and thus could not communicate with others. Some of the deaf children in hearing families had someone in the family (mother, uncle, cousin) with whom some kind of communication was possible but there was not fully competent discussion with them. Many deaf students started to learn their first language, sign language only after they started the school.

When students started their school, they used total communication and sometimes an interpreter to communicate with teachers and with other staff members.

"In the beginning when I came here, -- some of them (teachers and other staff members) knew some of the signs but majority did not. It was very hard for me --- I felt like having language deprivation because they talk and use fingerspelling for the child that does not know the grammar."

Literacy skills (reading and writing) and multilingual literacies of DHH learners

Students have not learned written Albanian at school. They know only some words in written Albanian but they do not understand any sentences. According to students, the biggest barriers for learning written Albanian are a lack of quality teaching, a lack of communication and of pedagogical skills of teachers.

In teaching written Albanian, teachers do not use visuals which would help them to understand. Students get long texts to copy, even though they do not understand the content of the text, and teachers are not making any efforts to explain. As one student describes: *"We need to imagine what is the meaning because when we ask the teacher, teacher says "do it yourself"; "don't sign, write it down. When we ask interpretation, the teacher says: "No just write it down."*

Nevertheless, students may get good grades despite not learn anything.

Students wish to have more Albanian lessons and to learn written Albanian. They wish to have instruction in proper sign language, and sign language assistants and interpreters in the classrooms since *"with just teachers we understand nothing"*. Also, students would like teachers to explain them the meanings of texts and when needed provide individual support.

Most of the students have someone in the family who is providing support. According to students, parents are not satisfied with the learning results in the school and particularly with the fact that

their children do not learn to read and write. *"I feel very ashamed that I do not read and write, but here it is a huge problem."* (a deaf student)

Teachers' and classroom assistants' practices when interacting with DHH

According to deaf students, teachers are not competent in sign language. There are only 2 or 3 teachers who use some sign language and other teachers are just speaking. Students reported that they teach signs to teachers, but they always forget them very fast.

Students explained that teachers usually write a text on the blackboard or give to students a text from the book. Students must copy the text into their notebooks even though they do not understand what is written and teachers don't give proper explanations.

Classroom assistants are working for 1 to 5 grades and their support in learning is highly valued by students because communication with them is in sign language and *"because they write and they visualise, they make it interesting for us"*.

As deaf students explained, a transfer from the 5th to the 6th grade seems to be very difficult for them. Students were given books with full of text which they did not understand, and teachers make them to copy the text into their notebooks without explaining the content of the text. Deaf students also reported that they do not receive any homework.

According to students, the sign language interpreters are very good and students learn better when they are present in the class. Interpreters make subjects more interesting for students because students can understand the language. They are essential for classrooms but most of the teachers do not invite interpreters into the classrooms even if students request them. According to students, there are only few teachers who use interpreters regularly. These teachers are the ones who use a bilingual approach in teaching. The problem is that teachers believe that they know sign language, but students do not understand them.

Students wish to have Sign language as a subject in the schools.

Learning environments and materials in and outside school

Visual materials and equipment to support learning are missing from the classrooms. Teachers are using blackboards, chalk, books and notebooks. There is a computer lab in the school, but students are not taught information technology (IT). They are just drawing and colouring with computers. Students are aware of the importance of IT in today's world and they question why IT is not taught to them during IT lessons.

Focus group interview was held in library and it was the first-time students had been there since it is always locked. One student noted: *"Yes, beautiful books and empty for us."*

According to students an ideal school would have good teachers with good sign language skills. There would be concrete materials, different pictures, video projectors and video materials for memorising and learning written Albanian; and there would be SL assistants and interpreters in the classroom.

Results of parents

The focus group interviews with parents aimed to gain information on early literacy practices outside the school and access to languages and education, and to gather the views of the parents on aspects that enable and/or disable the DHH learners to achieve a satisfactory level of achievements.

There were two focus groups of parents, one group had six deaf parents and the other five hearing parents. A sign language interpreter was used to interview deaf parents. Results of the focus groups had many similarities. The main difference is the mode of communication within the family.

Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners

Language in families with deaf parents is sign language which provides a good start for deaf children to learn a proper language and communicate with others from early childhood.

The situation in hearing families was different. In some cases, deaf children spent their whole early childhood without being able to communicate properly with anyone. Hearing parents didn't and still do not know sign language. In communication hearing parents are mainly using a spoken language, gestures, and some signs. There was not any proper communication and common understanding between the deaf child and the family. Children learnt sign language mainly from friends after they started school in Nena Tereze.

Some children have been fitted with a cochlear implant that allows some degree of hearing. However, they consider themselves deaf and they use sign language to communicate. Even though they may understand some spoken language, they have not learnt to speak fluently due to the lack of speech therapy. Parents wish to have a speech therapist at the school.

Literacy skills (reading and writing) and multilingual literacies of DHH learners

All parents are very worried about the education of their children at the school since they see that students are not learning any literacy skills.

Deaf parents are worried since their children can express themselves in SL very well, but they do not understand any written Albanian. Deaf parents can support their children in learning in sign language but not in literacy skills since they themselves have problems in understanding written language. Hearing parents are frustrated and dissatisfied with the learning outcomes in the school since they see no results.

All parents consider the quality of education in the school to be very poor. They are surprised and even angry that children do not learn to read and write. They wonder why they bring their child to the school. *"I don't know how much they teach children."*

Teachers' and classroom assistants' practices when interacting with DHH learners

According to deaf parents, SL skills of teachers are poor. Most of teachers and particularly the younger teachers do not use sign language, and teachers who do use some signs cannot communicate properly and cannot be understood in sign language. Deaf parents are very aware of what is happening in the classroom and in the school because their children tell them in sign language. The parents' message is clear: teachers lack sign language and pedagogical skills.

Parents informed the interviewers that their children are not getting any homework. During the COVID-19 health crisis, children were given texts to be copied but they did not understand anything. Parents are hoping that the new principal will bring in positive change in the school.

Parents seem to have a common understanding of the reasons why children do not learn to read and write at school: *"... because they (children) were not taught, and they didn't have chances to learn"*. According to parents, teachers lack pedagogical and communication skills for deaf education. They speak and write on the blackboard and children do not understand anything. Even though their children want to learn more, teachers are not interested to teach.

Classroom assistants are available on the grades 1 to 5 and their support is highly valued among students and parents. Parents wish to have assistants also in the higher grades. Some parents wonder how their children can be given good grades even if they do not read and write.

Understandings of the routes to literacy, language abilities, and high academic achievements of DHH learners

Parents are not happy about what is happening in the school. They wish that teachers would have more respect for students and take more care about the children. They have heard that sometimes teachers call their children "stupid".

Parents would like to see many changes in the school. They want their children to have quality teaching where teachers follow a stricter timetable in the school. Teachers should be active during lessons, explaining to students (not just making them copy), and they should provide more support for learning. Parents also wish to have more classroom assistants, sign language training for students, and more concrete learning materials suitable for deaf students. *"They should have repetition afternoons with educators, but they don't do it."* Also, material for sports activities are needed.

All parents are worried about the future of their children after they leave school because they have not learned to read and write.

Results of the education staff of the school

The goal of the interviews with the educational staff of the RC Nena Tereze was to provide insight into all five key areas of the study.

The school principal was interviewed individually. He is newly elected in the school and arrived three months ago. He does not know sign language but is willing to learn. 7 teachers were interviewed, 3 of them have 1-3 years of experience and 4 others have over 20 years of working experience in the school. Three of the teachers interviewed were class teachers, 2 Albanian language teachers, 1 VET teacher and one maths teacher. Young teachers reported that they didn't have any specific training for teaching the deaf students, but instead they had some training on inclusive education, whereas the teachers with longer experience stated they had training and also they gained a lot from experience.

Two SL interpreters, 1 SL instructor and 3 class assistants were interviewed. Classroom assistants are deaf, and they are former students of the Nena Tereze school. One has been at the school for 11 years, one for 4 years. They work with grades 1 to 5.

Three educators and two nurses were interviewed. Most of the educators and nurses interviewed have a long working experience.

Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners

According to SL experts, students from deaf families know SL when they come to school unlike students from hearing families. Since SL is not as a subject in the curriculum, students do not get any teaching in it. However, students who start the school without any language, learn SL quite fast when interacting with peers.

Teachers expressed their concerns about the skills of SL of deaf students. They said that many deaf students lack basic SL skills when they arrive in the school and this creates problems for them in teaching concepts and academic achievements foreseen by the regular curriculum. They stated that some deaf students first go to and stay in mainstream schools, and after failing there they come later to the RC Nene Tereze School. This creates huge difficulties for them in catching up with the regular curriculum. Teachers reported that SL skills of deaf students are improving constantly while they are in the school, first as a result of their work with them and also as result of interaction with their deaf peers in the school.

According to educators and nurses, the SL skills of students are very good, particularly those who come from deaf families. Educators and nurses have been working with deaf students for a very long time and they consider their own SL skills very good, only one of them considers her skills satisfactory. They have learnt SL in communication with children, and they also participate to the SL course organised in the school on Mondays and Fridays. In addition, they use speech which makes lipreading possible for children who have some residual hearing. To the question if educators read books or fairy tales to children, one of the educators replied that it is difficult to explain a fairy tale to a child with disabilities. She knows SL but considers her SL skills not sufficient for telling fairy tales.

Literacy skills and multilingual literacies of DHH learners

The school principal is aware about the very poor skills of deaf students in written Albanian language. He said that since deaf students are intelligent, his main reason for them not to learn the written Albanian is the wrong teaching methodology and lack of SL skills among teachers. His opinion is that first deaf students should learn SL and after that to teach them the written Albanian.

According to SL experts, there is not even one student in the school who knows how to read and write. Students may have some word level understanding but not sentences longer than 2-3 words. The reasons for students not learning literacy skill lie with the teachers' SL and pedagogical skills. None of the teachers use sign language and / or a bilingual approach. Even older teachers with long experience in the school have a problem with SL and teaching written Albanian.

Students with deaf parents have a language when they start school, but in learning written language they find themselves on the same level as others because teachers do not take their individual needs into account. During Albanian lessons students are taught lots of new words but there are not any visual materials available for them to understand them.

When teachers were asked about the written Albanian skills of deaf students, they stated that students manage to learn up to the level of the word. They stated that for deaf students it is difficult to learn sentences as it is complicated for them. Thus, they cannot communicate in written language.

According to educators, written communication of deaf students is difficult. Some children know some simple words. As an example, text messages that students send on mobile phones are very simple and difficult to understand them. There are no conjunctions and suffixes in their writing, only words which are not connected properly in the sentence. One of the persons interviewed thinks that the reason children do not learn literacy is because they mainly see written words and concepts on the blackboard, and they are not explained to them very well. Another person noted that *"you cannot compare these children with disabilities with normal children", "these children forget, they try and write several times and still forget"*.

Teachers' and classroom assistants' practices when interacting with DHH learners

According to SL experts, students have difficulties in communicating with teachers since teachers lack SL skills. Often teachers just use pointing which makes students nervous and upset. Up to 5th grade there are class assistants in the classroom and students can communicate with them.

Classroom assistants find communicating with teachers challenging for the for the same reason: teachers cannot communicate in SL and classroom assistants cannot communicate in written Albanian. Assistants know written Albanian on word-basis, but they do not understand written sentences. The assistant's role is more on counselling the students, meeting their different needs, and supporting the SL skills of the children.

When teachers were asked about their sign language skills, the majority of them reported that they possess good skills. Even the younger teachers stated that they know SL and students understand them during the lessons. Only one of the younger teachers reported that she is not good and does not feel competent in SL and uses the sign language interpreter in the class all the time. One of the younger teachers stated that his sign language skills are good, and he can manage to communicate for topics of everyday life but in teaching different concepts he still needs and uses the SL interpreter.

The experienced teachers who participated in the study expressed that they have sufficient sign language skills needed for teaching the deaf students, and they can communicate and are being understood by deaf students when they communicate in sign language. However, deaf students reported that very often they don't understand their teachers in the class and stated that the SL skills of teachers are very poor and expressed their wish to have SL interpreters in the class.

Teachers also reported that based on their perception, the SL as a language is very poor and doesn't have a proper grammar structure, and for many concepts that are needed in the teaching and learning process there are no signs in SL. Thus, they stated it is difficult for them to teach complex topics and the written Albanian language to deaf students since SL lacks a proper grammar, no conjunctions, no suffixes and is not possible to use verbs in different tenses.

Teachers reported that they use total communication in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students, meaning that they talk, sign, use gestures and write on the blackboard. They explained that this way it is easier to teach sign language and written language at the same time and they think that using total communication is beneficial to students in learning how to pronounce some spoken words. They stated that they write a lot on the blackboard, make drawings and some paper illustrations to make the teaching more concrete for their students. This was also noticed during one class observation. Teachers use also lipreading as they consider that it will help the deaf students understand better.

Use of interpreters in the classroom

When we asked teachers if teachers are using SL interpreters in their classes, they reported that they use them as much as possible them, especially the younger teachers who do not feel confident in SL. Class teachers stated that after they had the classroom assistants in their classes, they no longer needed SL interpreters as classroom assistants are also deaf and fluent in sign language. But there were reports that very often there are problems in communication between classroom assistants and teachers as teachers do not know the sign language and classroom assistants are not able to communicate in written Albanian and this creates problems in the coordination and preparation of the teaching plan and teaching contents. However, despite this, classroom assistants were reported to be a very good and useful resource in teaching deaf students and they are of a great help for teachers and deaf students.

According to SL experts, co-operation between teachers, interpreters and classroom assistants is lacking because teachers do not invite SL interpreters to come into the classroom. Teachers give justifications such as that they understand sign language or that they have a class assistant in the classroom.

Sometimes class assistants need an interpreter to communicate with the teacher, but teachers do not want to invite interpreters. There are teachers who do not know any SL and still do not want to invite an interpreter to the classroom. Unfortunately, information was given by the former principal to new teachers that they do not need to work with SL interpreters.

According to classroom assistants there isn't any planning done with teachers before lessons. Teachers prepare materials and during lessons classroom assistants try to give more visual information for students to understand.

Learning environments and materials in and outside school

Teachers reported that in their teaching they use books, notebooks, pens, some laminated illustrations, drawings, the blackboard and writing and drawing on the blackboard. According to them, there are no laptops, projectors and other technology available to make the teaching and learning more concrete and more attractive. Teachers also complained that the books they are using are very complex and very difficult to be used with deaf students, but they must use them since they have to follow the regular curriculum and very often, they are concerned to reach the learning results of the curriculum.

Learning materials used in the classroom and teaching are books, notebooks, blackboard, chalk. Some teachers use drawing. There are no visual materials and assistive devices available in the classroom. Materials are kept in teachers' cupboards, and they are not provided to classroom assistants, not even notebooks to work with the student.

According to the principal, there are some learning materials but still there is a need to invest more in materials. For example, Microsoft licences need to be updated. He reported that there are

some projectors in the school, but that teachers are not using them, whereas the teachers stated that they are not allowed to use them.

Homework

Teachers were asked also about the homework, and replied that they do give homework, but because students are not usually doing it, they tend not to give much. The homework given is mainly in writing different texts and teachers said that the writing for deaf students is boring and not attractive.

Educators collaborate with teachers to know what has been taught during the school day and what needs to be reinforced and repeated with students. Educators also provide support to children in learning. They have 2 hours of classes with students per day: 1 hour of Albanian and 1 hour of maths. Children are separated into groups according to their age. For example, with the group of smaller children educators illustrate different issues by drawing and explaining what is in the drawing (for example animals, fruit etc.). Educators go over what has been learnt at school with students in the morning and in the evening, and they support them by going over homework if there is any and when students need help in learning. According to them, these repetitions are needed, since deaf students forget.

Understandings of the routes to literacy, language abilities, and high academic achievements of DHH learners.

Curriculum and IEPs

The regular curriculum is being used in the school and according to the teachers, it creates significant difficulties for them since they do not have the freedom to modify the contents of the teaching. They would prefer to have the curriculum adapted for the needs of deaf students. Teachers have said that they use IEPs, but according to others, IEPs are prepared but not in use. The purpose of an IEP is to make differentiations and modifications of the content of the curriculum, teaching and learning materials possible for the individual needs of a student.

One of the teachers stated: *'We are forced to follow the curriculum. If an inspector comes to my class or the school principal, I am obliged to follow the regular curriculum'*. Teachers are following the regular curriculum to the letter and the individual needs of students are not met during lessons. According to the interviewees, lessons are always the same but for the teaching diary teachers change the subject according to the curriculum. From 6th to 12th grade teachers just make students write or make a copy a text without any explanation. They may use an interpreter for 2-3 minutes just to give the assignment.

During lessons teachers do not give students the opportunity to express themselves, to interact and to discuss. Teachers do not explain anything, but they expect them to memorise the text and on the following day the teacher wonders why the student doesn't remember.

Teachers have the perception that deaf students forget a lot and thus, much repetition is needed. They stated that they teach the students something on one day and by the next day, they have forgotten it. According to teachers, it is common for all deaf students to forget.

According to SL experts, since the basis for deaf students to learn a written language is through SL, teachers should be masters of SL. The pedagogical skills of teachers need to be improved, and they need to use a bilingual approach. More materials and particularly visual materials like videos, signing video materials, pictures, showing concrete materials, and lots of repetition should be used in teaching. Teachers need to give space for students to express themselves and take part in discussions in the classroom.

When teachers were asked what they thought needed to change in the school for deaf students to achieve more, they gave a list of things they considered important:

- Have a suitably adapted curriculum for deaf students;
- Have access to more laptops, tablets and technology to make teaching and learning more attractive;
- Teaching methodologies for deaf students;
- To have multidisciplinary teams (psychologists, speech therapists, pedagogues);
- SL training for students.

SL experts suggested that in order to improve co-operation in the classroom, lessons should be planned, and materials prepared with the classroom assistant, and teachers should say one day before what will happen during the lesson next day.

Additional requests raised were as follows:

- SL should be taught as a subject for at least 3-4 hours per week in the curriculum.
- The principal should ask SL interpreters, instructors, and classroom assistants to evaluate the SL skills of teachers.

Educators and nurses wanted more co-operation with teachers and other staff and that a multidisciplinary team be established in the school.

Absence from the school

Teachers complained about the level of student absenteeism the school. Others raised the issue of teachers often being absent from the school.

SL training at the school

According to the principal SL courses organised for the staff are not regularly attended by all teachers. His plan is to test teachers' SL skills and put in order the whole process.

When teachers were asked about the SL course organised in the school, they reported that only young teachers are still attending the courses. Older teachers stated that they stopped the course as they are being taught the same things as in the previous course and it is becoming boring for them.

Teachers also reported that the SL being taught in the course is poor and lacks lots of concepts, proper grammar and especially verb tenses which renders it difficult for them to grasp and use in the everyday teaching and learning process with deaf children. They stated that they would like to cover more complex topics in the course, not just isolated words, but to have also complex sentences with illustrations and concrete examples so that they can learn expressions in SL for different complex topics they need in teaching deaf students in different subjects. Teachers expressed the desire and willingness to learn more to improve their SL skills.

Summary of teachers' online survey

In order to involve more teachers and other staff of the RC in Prizren in the study, an online teachers' survey was conducted and a google questionnaire with thirty Likert-scale and two open ended questions was designed (see the Annex). The aim of the survey was to gain the insight of teachers and other staff regarding the situation of education of deaf and hard of hearing students in Nena Tereze school. There were 20 participants including teachers, educational staff and the school principal.

The questions in the survey covered a variety of topics related to the conditions and resources in the school and in general the situation of education of DHH students.

To the statement "MESTI provides us sufficient resources and support" 13 respondents expressed their satisfaction with the resources and support provided by MESTI. The same level of satisfaction was declared for the school infrastructure and environment for deaf and hard of hearing students. 15 respondents were satisfied with the infrastructure and agreed that the school environment is appropriate for deaf students. This appears to be contradictory, as many respondents when asked about the challenges in the school, mentioned the bad school infrastructure, cabinets and the technology they lack in the school.

All 20 respondents believe that the Resource Center in Prizren is the best option for the education of deaf and hard of hearing students. Parents and students during focus group interviews did not share the same opinion.

12 of the respondents consider the regular curriculum as very important and fully agreed that it should be followed. Regarding the demands of the curriculum and its adaptation, 9 of respondents believed that the demands of the regular curriculum make it difficult for DHH students to achieve curriculum requirements, 7 of them were neutral and 2 of them did not agree with the statement. 9 of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there are adapted materials available for DHH students, 8 of them were neutral and 3 of them disagreed. The lack of adapted materials was declared in all focus groups interviews and was visible during the classroom observations.

16 respondents reported that they apply the bilingual method of teaching and 19 of them think that they have sufficient skills to teach and support deaf students in the school. Also, the majority (19) of them declared that they have good sign language skills, that they are using SL during their teaching and deaf students understand them when they use sign language. The competencies of SL skills of teachers were not confirmed by deaf students during the focus group interviews. On the contrary, students stated that very often they do not understand their teachers in class.

The majority (19) of respondents reported that during their teaching they use total communication: speech, cued speech, signs and gestures. According to teachers, the use of total communication is important since DHH students benefit from it. This contradicts the declaration of using proper sign language with deaf students in the class.

Respondents were asked also about the learning expectations and learning results of deaf students. The majority (16) of the respondents declared that they have high expectations, and 15 of them declared they are satisfied with the learning achievements of their students. The majority (15) of them are of the opinion that students with DHH have a limited capacity to learn as they lack general understanding. This sounds particularly alarming and shows that the education staff do not believe in the capacities of their students. This lack of confidence was also noticed in some focus group interviews when several people declared that deaf students forget a lot.

The majority (17) of respondents declared that they are developing methods of teaching that respond to the needs of deaf children and 15 of them declared that it is too difficult to modify the instruction, the teaching style and learning materials for the needs of their students.

11 respondents declared that it is not difficult to teach reading and writing in Albanian to deaf students, four of them were neutral and 5 of them disagreed. But the fact remains that deaf students are not learning to read and write, even after the complete 12 years of schooling.

Most of the teachers (16) reported they are using IEPs, even though in focus group interviews with other staff members the opposite was told.

10 of the respondents were satisfied with the work and collaboration with teachers and classroom assistants and 13 of respondents (obviously teachers) declared using SL interpreters in their classes. Classroom assistants seemed to be a good and positive experience in the school, but

students declared in their interviews that SL interpreters are not regularly invited by teachers in their classes.

13 of the respondents reported that pre-service training has equipped them with the skills needed for teaching deaf children. 14 of them also reported that they had sufficient in-service teacher training on how to teach deaf students. Teachers declared that they need further training on deaf education.

13 of the respondents thought that there was good collaboration with parents and that parents are satisfied with the learning achievements of their deaf children. However, during focus group interviews, the parents were not of the same opinion. Parents expressed their concerns regarding the low achievements of their children in the school.

Teachers expressed their concerns and would like to change many things in the school. They think they need a better infrastructure, more didactic tools, laboratories, concrete teaching methodologies for deaf students, an increase of SL skills for teachers, in-service teacher training, curriculum adaptations and more advanced technology to be used in the teaching and learning process.

Observations made in the classrooms

During the visit to the school the research team also made class observations. Four class observations were made: One lesson in the class teaching third grade, 2 classes of Albanian language and one math class in upper grades.

In one of the classes observed the teacher was working together with the class assistant and in other three classes the teacher was alone with students. No sign language interpreters were present in any of the classes observed.

In all of the observed classes, the number of students in the class was very low, from 2 to maximum 4 students. The small number of students made the lesson neither active nor interactive.

In the classes observed, during the teaching and learning, there were hardly any visual or tactile learning materials available. Teachers were mainly using books, notebooks, blackboard and chalk, some simple drawings on the blackboard and some laminated cards that were prepared by teachers.

Based on the observations made, there was no modern technology such as projectors, laptops, videos, video captioning or other forms of illustrations used. Teachers were using the blackboard and chalk. Teachers were writing texts on the blackboard and trying to explain to students the meaning of the text in the sign language.

The sign language of teachers was accompanied with talking, gestures, cues and other forms of total communication. Based on the teachers' explanations they use total communication to allow for hard of hearing students to learn to pronounce words and also to lipread. It was not possible to evaluate the skills of teachers in SL, but based on SL interpreter observations the SL used is not at the highest level required. Furthermore, little discussion in SL between teachers and students was noticed.

Based on observations made and discussions held with teachers, the same books were used in teaching deaf children and the same curriculum that is used in mainstreams schools with hearing children. No adaptations of the curriculum were noticed or declared by teachers. Teachers stated that they are using IEPs with students, but during the observations in class neither implementation nor consultation with such plans was noticed. Teachers stated that they are obliged to follow the books and the regular curriculum and that they stick to that practice.

Students' notebooks were full of written texts. When students were asked to explain what the texts were about, and they couldn't explain in SL. This is because they do not understand what they have written. They were able to read and explain a few simple words, but not sentences. Observations in the classroom showed that students do much copying of written texts from the blackboard and books without understanding what the written text is about.

Good practices were seen during observations in the class where the class teacher worked together with a classroom assistant. While the teacher was teaching, the class assistant was supporting students individually by doing lots of signing with students. However, even here the classroom assistant had more of a technical role and little preparatory and coordination teamwork was noticed.

There were some students with cochlear implants in the classroom but no appropriate support was provided to them in speech therapy at the school.

Additional note: There are some students with other disabilities, such as autism or intellectual disabilities. They seemed to make the work of the teacher more challenging and in fact, these students do not gain much from the education offered in Nena Tereza school.

Other results

This study also aimed to throw light upon 'best practices' found in the RC Nena Tereze that enable higher achievements. It also aimed to highlight any existing tensions between everyday interactional practices and policies that promote inclusive education, to propose actions for accessible and inclusive education and to create new perspectives for the development of education for DHH learners.

Best practices found in the Nena Tereze school

The study aimed to throw light upon 'best practices' found in Nena Tereze school. These practices are related to the deaf community within the school and to the employment and work of sign language experts.

Feeling of belonging to the community

During interviews of students, it became clear that students enjoyed being at the school. This is because they have friends with whom they can socialise with and communicate in their own language. There are a number of students who learned sign language only after coming to school and socialising with other deaf students. The school provides a community for DHH students where they feel they belong. This would not be the case in inclusion of deaf students in mainstream schools.

In the case of deaf and hard of hearing students using sign language being included in a mainstream school, there should be other deaf and sign language users in the school to socialise with. They should be provided with teaching in sign language and the services of a SL interpreter during all lessons in cases where the teacher is not fluent in sign language.

The employment and work of sign language experts

The results of this study show that the work of sign language experts (classroom assistants, interpreters and instructors) is highly invaluable in the school.

- ▶ **Classroom assistants** are doing valuable work with students, and they are very well perceived by students. Being deaf and native sign language users themselves, classroom assistants are supporting the teaching and learning of deaf and hard of hearing students in for example explaining different concepts and notions during lessons and thus in supporting the development of students' sign language skills.

The work of classroom assistants and collaboration with teachers should be further developed. Classroom assistants should be more involved in the teaching process and not just playing a technical role in supporting deaf students. More collaboration with the teacher and the classroom assistant is needed in lesson planning and in the preparation of teaching and learning materials for lessons. Currently, the main challenge for this type of collaboration is the lack of a common language. The teachers are not fluent in sign language skills and the classroom assistants are unable to read and write. These skills should be developed. Classroom assistants are working in grades 1-5, but they are highly needed also on upper grades.

- ▶ **Sign language interpreters** are assisting the learning process in the school by supporting students and teachers and other staff in communication. They need to be more involved and used at full capacity in the school. Students expressed the desire to have an interpreter supporting them during lessons and the school should provide an interpreter to all lessons when a teacher is not fluent in sign language.

- ▶ **The Sign language Instructor** plays a crucial role in the development of sign language skills of teachers and other staff in the school by organising courses for all the staff. Sign language courses should be taken more seriously by the staff and their skills need to be tested and verified. Sign language Instructors can also be used in the work with deaf children by organising courses in Sign language for deaf students.

- ▶ **Existing tensions at the school**
There were slight tensions probably due to the lack of mutual respect and understanding between the deaf community in the school and the hearing staff. Joint training and workshops to build professional capacity and collaboration among the staff and a strong leadership of the school principal could strengthen the collaboration and help overcome the situation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

1. Access to languages and early literacy practices among DHH learners

Deaf students from deaf families acquired SL in their early childhood and they were well prepared to learn written Albanian when they started the school.

Deaf and hard of hearing students from hearing families were without a language and some of them remained without anyone to communicate with until they started the school in Nena Tereze. In school they learnt SL by communicating mainly with their deaf peers. Thus, many deaf and hard of hearing students are starting school without any language at all.

2. Literacy skills (reading and writing) and multilingual literacies of DHH learners

According to research, a deaf student's knowledge of sign language predicts her/his ability to learn to read. A strong foundation in one's mother tongue or first language supports learning to read. (Savolainen, A. et al 2020; Rudner et al. 2015; Mayer & Trezek 2014.) Deaf students who acquire sign language as early as possible tend to be more successful at school including learning literacy skills compared to those who learn sign language later e.g. when starting school (Tupi, E. 2019).

This is not the case among students in Nena Tereze. The reading skills test conducted in the study showed no difference whether the child already had sign language skills or not when starting school. It also showed that none of the students who participated to the test were able to read and understand simple sentences and communicate in written Albanian.

One of the reasons why deaf students are not learning to read may be that teachers are not using any systematic method in teaching written Albanian. It is also because teachers are not fluent in sign language and thus are not able to teach written Albanian language to deaf students through sign language. Another reason might be that deaf students are not given SL as a subject and little attention is paid to deaf students' skills in SL. Students' achievements are not evaluated, and they move to the next grade level even if they haven't learned anything. They might even be given top grades. Teachers in upper grades blame teachers of lower grades for not having taught literacy skills to students.

3. Teachers' and classroom assistants' practices when interacting with DHH learners.

The high rate of illiteracy among deaf people can be explained by the wrong medium of education failing in providing the necessary pedagogical support for deaf students to acquire strong literacy skills. (Tupi, E. 2019). The results of the study showed that classroom practices in RC Nena Tereze need to be improved, including respecting a strict schedule of learning and teaching by teachers and students, revisiting the language of instruction, management of the class, teaching practices in the classroom, collaboration with SL experts and teaching materials used in the classroom.

Teachers follow the regular curriculum. They have prepared Individualised Educational Plans for the students, but are not implementing them. Their reason is that they must follow the regular curriculum in case of inspection by inspectors or the principal. Thus, teachers write the diary according to the curriculum which does not happen.

Students are getting high marks even if they do not understand anything. Even parents are unhappy with the top grades their children get from teachers since they can see that their children have not learned anything.

Even though teachers consider their SL skills to be good, the fact is that their skills are not sufficient to teach DHH students. Students reported that they do not understand some of their teachers in the classroom.

Teaching practices in the classroom seem to be out to date. At grades 6-12, teachers give texts mainly from the study book or write the text on the blackboard, and the students are asked to copy the text. Teachers do not give any explanations what the words, sentences, and the whole content of the texts mean. Evidence of this was received also during observations in the classroom. Students were asked what was written in the text they had copied, and they were unable to say it in SL.

Observations in the classroom showed that lessons are not interactive. Several focus group members related that during lessons students do not have opportunities to express themselves, to interact or to discuss.

Collaboration with SL experts in the classroom is not at a satisfactory level. Collaboration with classroom assistants who work at grades 1-5 functions somewhat despite the fact that there is no proper mutual understanding between the teacher and the classroom assistant. Teachers do not know SL properly and classroom assistants are not literacy skilled. There is no common planning and lesson preparation together. Teachers do not provide any teaching materials prior to the lessons, and during lessons and classroom assistants try their best to use visuals to help students to understand.

There is no collaboration between teachers and SL interpreters. In grades 6-12 there are only teachers in the classroom with students and SL interpreters are not invited by even if students request for them.

There seems to be a lack of mutual respect between teachers and SL experts in the school. It has led to conflict which needs to be solved for fruitful collaboration to take place in the classroom. Teachers and sign language interpreters should work together to fill the gap in students' knowledge by using appropriate signs and SL to pass on instruction in the classroom. (Adigun, O. T. 2020.)

4. Learning environments and materials in and outside school

The school building is old, but according to the principal it fulfils its purpose. Classrooms are large and the only furniture is desks, chairs, and a few shelves. No attention has been paid to making classrooms comfortable and attractive for students to learn. The lighting in the classrooms according to the interviewees is suitable for students with DHH.

Deaf students access information through visual and tactile means, and therefore provision of visual cues and information is a fundamental part of DHH education. (Yuknis, C et al. 2017.) This does not happen at Nena Tereze school. There are hardly any visuals to help students understand written Albanian. Teachers stated that since they must follow the regular curriculum, they use the same books that are used with hearing children even though they consider these books to be very complex and difficult to use with DHH students. Teachers are concerned about reaching the learning results of the curriculum.

Other than books teachers use notebooks, pens, some paper illustrations that had been laminated by the school, drawings, chalk and the blackboard. There are no laptops, projectors and other technology in use to make teaching and learning more concrete and more attractive. Teachers stated that projectors are not available, but according to the principal projectors are available for use.

A lack of materials and visuals was also visible during the classroom observations. One class teacher had written the seasons of the year and made some drawings on the blackboard which was discussed with students. The students practice writing by copying the text into their notebooks, but when asked, they did not understand the content of the text they had written. In grades 6-12 only books for copying are in use.

Students do not receive any proper homework and even if students get homework, it is not supervised or monitored closely and given feedback to students is not given by the teacher. This information was received and validated from different sources.

5. Understandings of the routes to literacy, language abilities, and high academic achievements of DHH learners

Even though according to the survey, expectations for students' achievements are rather high, most of those interviewed stated that teachers' expectations for students' achievements are very low. Teachers believe that students forget and that they do not have the capacity to learn.

Students need to feel valued and this is currently not the case at the school. They participate in the classes without having any understanding of what has been taught.

Recommendations

Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation

- To establish a working group to establish a comprehensive action plan for the development of the RC Nena Tereze.
- To develop an adapted curriculum for deaf students in the school. The curriculum should contain specific arrangements with regards to SL, Albanian written language and English language and other basic contents and skills to be taught to deaf students.
- To develop a curriculum in sign language for lower grades 1-5.
- To include sign language as a subject in the curriculum for the DHH at all levels in primary and upper secondary education.
- To organise preschool classes for deaf children with deaf adults to develop their sign language skills.
- To accredit training in SL as in-service teacher training and fully recognised as part of professional development.
- To co-operate with Faculties of Education to incorporate modules for sensory impairments into the teacher training.
- To organise training for teachers on bilingual education and how to make curriculum modifications through IEPs for DHH students.
- To ensure when hiring that new staff are suitably qualified.
- To hire more classroom assistants and instructors to be involved in the teaching and education process.
- To organise training for deaf classroom assistants in written Albanian language so that they can communicate with hearing teachers and other staff.

Faculty of Education

- In collaboration with the KAD, to develop a training module in Bachelor studies for future teachers on DHH education including bilingual education.

Municipal Education Directorate - MED

- Inspectors need to be trained in the basics of DHH education so that they can monitor teaching in the classroom. The training must include specifics about DHH education such as teaching strategies and methods, bilingual education and curriculum adaptations through IEPs and the assessment of students with IEP.

School Principal

- To monitor classes;
- To ensure that there is a strict schedule of teaching and learning and to be respected by the staff of the school and students;
- To ensure that teachers prepare their lesson plans and actively implement them ;
- To ensure that equipment and teaching materials are made available to and used by teachers;
- To ensure that interpreters are used during lessons;
- To ensure that IEPs are in use;
- To ensure that the Teachers' diaries are written in accordance with the actual teaching;
- To ensure that all staff members are familiar with the "Guideline for inclusive education, bilingualism, and sign language for DHH children";
- To ensure that teachers and other staff members participate in the SL training organised in the school;
- To ensure that teachers and other staff members participate in other training organised in the school;
- To organise extra lessons in sign language for deaf students who need it;
- To provide extracurricular activities for deaf students in the afternoons by including more deaf adults;
- To organise courses on sign language for hearing parents of deaf students;
- To create an atmosphere of collaboration and trust in the school between deaf staff and teachers and educators;
- To continue more strictly with the SL course for teachers and other staff in the school: Teachers and other staff to be evaluated in SL to define their competency level.

Teachers

- Teachers need to abandon the idea of using total communication and instead learn and use Sign Language.
- Teachers must regularly participate in sign language training, which should be organised at different levels. SL courses for staff and tests to be organised for different levels from A1-B2.
- Teachers must be trained in bilingual education.
- Teachers must be provided with hands-on training on how to use IEPs, how to use bilingual approach in DHH education, how to make a lesson plan, how to prepare materials suitable for DHH students for the lessons, how to use visual materials, video illustrations with subtitles in written Albanian, how to use projectors and all possible visual materials in teaching, and how to collaborate with classroom assistants and SL interpreters. This training needs be long-term and with a trainer who is very experienced in DHH education. The training must take place at the school and in the classroom and preferably in collaboration with the classroom assistants and SL interpreters.
- To develop visual and concrete materials in sign language with lots of illustrations for deaf students.

- Regularly give homework to students, closely monitor the outputs and coordinate with educators and parents.
- Teachers should familiarise themselves with the Guideline for Inclusive Education, bilingualism and sign language for children with hearing impairments.

Kosovo Association for the Deaf

- To raise awareness among family members of DHH children about the right of their children to quality education;
- To raise awareness among family members of DHH children on the importance of learning sign language (not only for the DHH child but also for family members);
- To work with the hearing families of a deaf child on the SL skills of children before they come to school;
- To provide SL training for parents of deaf children;
- To collaborate with deaf communities in different parts of Kosovo to ensure that families of DHH children have the opportunity to receive training on SL;
- To work closely with the school and develop further the materials of the SL course for teachers and make it more attractive for teachers and other staff of the school;

References

- Adigun, O. T. 2020. Computer-assisted instruction, project-based learning and achievement of Deaf learners in Biology. *Journal of E-Learning and Knowledge Society*, 16(1), 23-32. <https://doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1135190>
- Adigun, O.T. & Nzima, R. 2020. Digitalized Versus Interpreted Biology Instructions for Deaf Learners: Implications for a Technosociety. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, Vol. 10, No 5, 265-272.
- Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo. 2011. Law No.04/L –032 on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo. Prishtina, Kosovo: Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo.
- Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) Deaf and Hard of Hearing. <https://www.adcet.edu.au/inclusive-teaching/specific-disabilities/deaf-hearing-impaired>
- Cairns, K., McLaren, p., Clinton, J. & Aston, R. (2014) Evaluation Methods for Vulnerable Populations: The Case for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Wayback Machine (archive.org)
- Deaf-friendly Education. National Deaf Children's Society. Northern Ireland. 2022. deaf-friendly-education-northern-ireland.pdf
- Deaf pupils failed by education system for fifth consecutive year. 2020. National Deaf Children's Society. <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/latest-news/deaf-pupils-failed-by-education-system-for-fifth-consecutive-year/>
- Dostal, H., Gabriel, R. & Weir, J. 2017. Supporting the Literacy Development of Students Who Are Deaf/Hard of Hearing in Inclusive Classrooms. *The Reading teacher* 71.3 (2017): 327–334.
- Hartman, M. C. & Smolen, E.R. & Powell, B. 2023. Curriculum and Instruction for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Evidence from the Past—Considerations for the Future. *Education Sciences*. Curriculum and Instruction for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students: Evidence from the Past—Considerations for the Future (mdpi.com)
- Herring, T. J., Woolsey, M. J. 2020. Three suggested teaching strategies for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. *Support for Learning SFL*, vol 35, issue 3, August 2020, Pages 346-358. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12314>
- How to support a child with a hearing impairment in school. 2022. Engage Education. <https://engage-education.com/blog/how-to-support-a-child-with-a-hearing-impairment-in-school/>

- Knors H, Marschark M. 2012. Language planning for the 21st Century: Revisiting bilingual language policy for deaf children. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*. 2012;17:291–305.
- Luft, P. 2016. What is different about Deaf Education? The Effects of Child and Family Factors on Educational Services. *JSpecEduc-2016-Luft.pdf*
- Marschark, K., Shaver, D. M., Nagle, K.M & Newman, L. 2015. Predicting the Academic Achievement of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students from Individual, Household, Communication, and Educational Factors. *Except Child*. 2015 Apr; 81(3): 350–369. Predicting the Academic Achievement of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students From Individual, Household, Communication, and Educational Factors - PMC (nih.gov)
- Mayer, C. & Trezek, B. J. 2014. Is reading different for deaf individuals? Examining the role of phonology. *American Annals of the Deaf* vol. 159 (4), 359–371.
- Millet, P. 2023. Assessing Classroom Learning Environments. *Canadian Audiologists*. 2023 Vol. 10. Issue 1.
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. 2013. Administrative Instruction No. 18/2013: The use of Individual Education Plan. Republic of Kosovo. 18-2013-ua.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. 2013. Administrative Instruction No. 2/2018: Resource Centres. Republic of Kosovo. 23-2013-ua.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. 2012. Administrative Instruction No. 26/2012 Personnel qualifications working with Students with Special Education Needs. ua-26-2012-new.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. 2012. Administrative Instruction No. 12/2012 Criteria's for Election of Assistants and Instructors for Inclusive Education and their Obligations. ua-12-2012-new.pdf
- Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. 2019. Guideline for Inclusive Education, bilingualism and sign language for children with hearing impairments.
- Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation. 2022. Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2022-2026. Prishtina, Kosovo: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
- Pizzo L. & Chilvers, A. 2019. Assessment of Language and Literacy in Children Who Are d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing. *Education Sciences*. education-09-00223.pdf
- Rudner, M., Andin, J., Rönnerberg, J., Heimann, M., Hermansson, A., Nelson, K. ja Tjus, T. 2015. Training literacy skills through Sign Language. *Deafness & Education International* 2015 vol. 17 (1), 7–18. Full article: Training Literacy Skills through Sign Language (tandfonline.com)

Räsänen, P. & Tahiraj, G. 2008. Test Leximi per Kosove. KAPIE & FSDEK II.

Savolainen, A., Ranta, K., Saastamoinen, M., Niemi K. & Ervelius, T. 2020. Kuulovammaisen lukemaan oppimisessa hyödynnetään useita eri menetelmiä. Kielikukko 2/ 2020.

Scheetz, N.A.; Martin, D.S. 2008. National Study of Master Teachers in Deaf Education: Implications for Teacher Education. *Am. Ann. Deaf* 2008, 153, 328–343.

Stronge, J.H. Qualities of Effective Teachers. 2018. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA, USA.

Suarsana, I. M. 2021. Developing interactive digital mathematics book with multi representation approach for deaf students. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (Online)*, Vol. 16(13), 128-141. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v16i13.22459>

Swanwick, R. 2016. Deaf children's bimodal bilingualism and education. *Language Teaching*, 49 (1). pp. 1-34. Deaf children's bimodal bilingualism and education (whiterose.ac.uk)

Takala, M., & Sume, H. 2015. Kuuleeko -koulu? -tutkimushankkeen loppuraportti opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriölle. *Kuuleeko_koulu_raportti_9.12.2015.pdf;sequence=1 (helsinki.fi)*

Terms of Reference for conducting a Study on the level of achievements of students with hearing impairment. 2023. Joint European Union/Council of Europe project "Building Capacity for Inclusion in Education – INCLUDE.

The UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2007.

Tupi, E. 2019. SIGN LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND ITS MEMBER STATES. Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. *168093e08f (coe.int)*

Wolbers, K. A., Dostal, H. M., Cihak, D. & Holcomb, L. 2020. Written Language Outcomes of Deaf Elementary Students Engaged in Authentic Writing. *Journal of deaf studies and deaf education* 25.2 (2020): 224–238

Yuknis, C., Santini, J. & Appanah, T. 2017. Supporting Deaf Students – And All Students. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/supporting-deaf-students-and-all-students>

Annex: Teachers' online questionnaire

Background information

Select your options.

Gender	Female <input type="radio"/> Male <input type="radio"/>
Education	Bachelor <input type="radio"/> Master <input type="radio"/> PhD <input type="radio"/> Other <input type="radio"/> What: _____
Working as	Class teacher <input type="radio"/> Subject teacher <input type="radio"/> Subject teacher <input type="radio"/> Other <input type="radio"/> what _____
Experience working in Nena Teresa school	_____ years

1= strongly disagree | 2 = disagree | 3= neutral | 4= agree | 5= strongly agree

		1	2	3	4	5
1	MESTI provides us sufficient resources and support.					
2	We have good collaboration with parents.					
3	The Resource Centre is the best setting for educating Deaf and HoH students.					
4	The infrastructure and environment of our school is suitable for Deaf and HoH students.					
5	We have adapted teaching and learning materials for Deaf and HoH students available in our school.					
6	Demands of the curriculum makes it difficult for students with Deaf and HoH students to learn.					
7	I am able to apply bilingual method in my teaching.					
8	I have enough knowledge and skills to teach and support Deaf and HoH students.					
9	I am capable to explain in SL concepts used in teaching to my students.					
10	I have no problems in communicating in SL with my students.					
11	I mainly use total communication including speech, cued speech, gestures and some signs during my lessons.					
12	My students do not have a problem understanding me during lessons.					
13	Deaf and hard of hearing students have limited capacity to learn because they lack general understanding.					
14	I rather work alone in the classroom with my students.					
15	SL assistant is supporting me and my students during lessons daily.					
16	Educators provide sufficient support to our students in doing their homework.					
17	I use the support of SL interpreter during my classes regularly.					
18	In our school, we develop ways of teaching that respond to the needs of Deaf and HoH students.					

19	It is too difficult to modify the instruction, teaching style and teaching and learning materials to meet the needs of Deaf and HoH students.					
20	For me as a teacher, it is highly important to follow the curriculum of the grade.					
21	In my teaching I follow Individualized Educational Plans of my students and differentiate my teaching accordingly.					
22	My pre-service teacher training provided me skills to teach Deaf and HoH students.					
23	I have received sufficient in-service training on Deaf education.					
24	It is difficult for me to teach to deaf and hard of hearing students to learn to read and write.					
25	Deaf and hard of hearing students after finishing the school are able to communicate in written Albanian language					
26	I have high expectations on my students.					
27	I am satisfied with the learning results of my students.					
28	Students in our school are supporting one another in learning.					
29	Our students are happy to be in our school.					
30	Parents of Deaf and HoH students are happy to have their children educated in our school and are satisfied with the learning results of their children.					

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

www.coe.int

The member states of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

www.europa.eu



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE