

## **Challenges in Teacher Training in Teaching Hungarian as a Foreign Language**

### **1. Traditions in Teacher Training of Hungarian as a Foreign Language**

Teaching HFL has a 200 years' history in Hungary<sup>1</sup> but teacher training began very late, in 1982, at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. The postgraduate teacher training program was available for teachers with profession of Hungarian and another L<sub>2</sub> language teacher's certificate. The training took three years; the content, the requirements and the methodology tried to meet the special needs of the future HFL language learners.

However, since Hungary joined the Bologna process, HFL teaching profession training is available at the faculties of Liberal Art in several universities in Hungary. There is a wide selection of training programs; teachers of Hungarian as a foreign language might be trained in BA or MA levels.

In BA-level there are three universities conducting a HFL teacher minor program. Students of Hungarian as major are permitted to take HFL as a minor training at the University of Pécs, University of Veszprém and University of Miskolc. A former possibility was the minor program in MA-level, only for students with liberal arts' BA-diploma and level C2 language exam (any language) at University of Debrecen. This program has been changed to a new MA program called Hungarology that is available at Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, University of Debrecen and University of Szeged. Hungarology contains courses on teaching Hungarian as a foreign language but the focus is on Hungarian culture, history and economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Nádor 2006.

The Eötvös Loránd University and the Károli Gáspár Protestant University follow a new way. At these universities, the HFL teacher training is available as a 2, 3 or 5 semesters' program for students with Liberal Arts' BA-diploma. A C2 language certificate (of any foreign language) is required from the applicants. These universities also offer a non-Bologna program for their students with HFL teacher training as a minor program.

The profession of an HFL teacher is opened only for students studying at Liberal Art faculties at the biggest, most frequent universities in Hungary.

## **2. Learners of Hungarian as a foreign language**

Owing to the educational circumstances of the second part of the 20th century, the teacher training of HFL teachers kept an eye only on adult language learners. The typical Hungarian language learner has been a young adult, coming to Hungary for his/her university studies. For this reason teacher training focused on the methodology of adult language learners. The main goal of language learning was a deep knowledge in the areas of Hungarian grammar and specialized vocabulary of their later studies, from liberal arts to medicine or technical and economical sciences. The HFL teacher training tried to meet these requirements, and the teachers worked out the suitable methodology of teaching HFL in these conditions. The program contained many historical, geographical, cultural, economic topics to enable the students to get informed on Hungarian history, geography etc. The students of HFL teacher training had to keep refreshing their knowledge on the newest results of Hungarian linguistics, to be able to teach Hungarian grammar to learners. The program expanded to the newest methodology and methods of foreign language teaching as well. Nonetheless, at the end of their studies the students became great Hungarian language teachers – for adults.

However, at the end of the 20th century, a greater number of new Hungarian language learners appeared in Hungary. The new target group contained businesspersons and their family, which posed new challenges against teacher training traditions. In the last

decade of the 20th century, a new group of language learners was born: young (3–10 years old) learners.

### **3. Young language learners in Hungarian education**

Hungary has been a member of the European Union since the 1st May, 2004. Since the borders have opened, an increasing number of immigrants come to live in Hungary. In the first decade of the 21st century, the number of immigrants in Hungary did not have big amplitude. Most of the immigrants came from neighboring countries, especially from former territories of Hungary. These immigrants do not have language problems, as their native language is mostly Hungarian.

However, in the past few years the number of immigrants has been strongly increasing. In 2012 the number of registered immigrants was 1677, in 2013 this number was 16930. Even if Hungary is not one of the target countries of European migration (most of the immigrants want to leave Hungary and spread across different countries in Europe), this process has significant impact in education: since 2002, the validity of educational liability extends to all children who have lived at least one year in Hungary, regardless whether they are Hungarian or immigrants for very different reasons<sup>2</sup> (*Table 1*). The rules entail responsibility for children, their parents, and the educational institutes as well. To conform to the rules of the European Union, every institute with a multicultural education program is obligated to guarantee Hungarian language lessons twice a week, until the pupils reach the level of competence in Hungarian that enables them to have the same chance to learn as the Hungarian pupils have<sup>3</sup>. This rule prescribes kindergartens and primary schools to employ an (at least a part-time) HFL teacher.

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<sup>2</sup> Feischmidt/Nyíri 2006.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nefmi.gov.hu/nemzetkozi-kapcsolatok/interkulturalis/interkulturalis> [24 January 2014].

Table 1: Number of foreign citizens in kindergartens and primary schools between 2001-2013<sup>4</sup>

Academic year	Kindergarten	Primary school
2001/02	1048	3561
2010/11	1701	4288
2011/12	2366	5954
2012/13	2696	6310

The ratio of foreign children in kindergartens is 0,8%. The ratio of non-Hungarian pupils is 0,85%. Another important fact is that 1904 of kindergarten pupils and 3990 of primary school pupils are not from the neighboring countries. Because for these children Hungarian cannot be a native language, they need language education beside school education as well. This rate does not seem to be large but it also contains a latent problem. To understand this latent problem and to discover the challenges in teacher training process, some anomalies should be considered in relation to the facts above.

#### **4. Anomalies in teacher training in HFL related to the language learners' needs**

Considering the facts and data of HFL teacher training and the raising number of immigrants (even children), three problems have to be discovered and solved:

- 1) Schools with multicultural education program and more languages are concentrated in Budapest, the capital.
- 2) Young language learners can appear in different areas and regions of Hungary.
- 3) HFL teachers are trained in Liberal Art faculties of several universities.

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<sup>4</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Education 2012/2013, 37; 22.

It poses a further problem that while 46,2% of the immigrants live in Budapest and another 36,8% in the other big cities in Hungary, the remaining 20,6% live in the other regions, small towns and villages<sup>5</sup>.

HFL teachers, as well as multilingual and multicultural primary or grammar schools are concentrated in Budapest. Bigger cities with international businesses and a growing industry live up to the challenge of foreign pupils; additionally, to find and employ an HFL teacher is very easy in the capital or some of the big cities in Hungary. However, foreign families, foreign pupils can appear in varying places and institutes all around Hungary. In some of the areas of Hungary, it is almost impossible to find a professional HFL teacher.

Concerning teacher training, there is a noticeable niche in the HFL profession. As the HFL teachers are trained in Liberal Art faculties, none of the students completing a BA level diploma in teacher training – such as kindergarten, primary school or special education teacher trainees – have a chance to become an HFL teacher. This problem is not solved yet but more and more authors exhort its importance and mention that young language learners need different methods of teaching than adults.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, authors point out that the competence and knowledge of primary teachers are essential and mandatory in teaching HFL to children.<sup>7</sup> In spite of the increasing number of essays on HFL teaching methodology, up to now there has not been any concise work that collected methods applied in HFL. There are especially big gaps in the literature of teaching HFL to children, worsened by the lack of useful and modern language books, which live up to the new challenges in HFL teaching and are specifically developed for children.

In conclusion, on the one hand is the tradition in education that HFL teachers are trained at Liberal Arts' universities in BA or Master level; on the other hand, these teachers would need the teaching competence of a primary school teacher, which is not available to them. Needs of the HFL teachers and the possibilities in the teacher training process will never meet and it causes a big deficit in teaching

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<sup>5</sup> KSH-PI 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Schmidt 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Csonka 2006.

HFL to immigrant children and never gives the balanced chance for them in education.

### **5. A possible solution**

To fill this niche, the Faculty of Pedagogy of Kaposvár University has been offering a two-semester optional course since 2009 that introduces the applying students of teacher, kindergarten and special education training to the methods of Hungarian language teaching. Starting from the academic year 2014/2015 – within the framework of a pioneer project initiative – with the specialization course “Hungarian for foreign and immigrant children”, our faculty aims to prepare the aspiring teachers for those children who arrive into the first years of the Hungarian schooling system without Hungarian language knowledge. This two-year program expands perspectives of students on their own native language, forms the necessary new point of view in teaching methodology, different from their knowledge as a native Hungarian teacher of native Hungarian pupils, and gives a great amount of practical knowledge, methods, good practices in the classroom processes.

The content of the program includes three modules: a pedagogical module, a Hungarian language and literature module and a Hungarian as a foreign language module. In the framework of the first two modules the students acquire several new subjects and topics which are not available for them in the training leading, such as sociolinguistic, a concise introduction to functional grammar or different approaches of language teaching considering history of language teaching, children’s literature or drama in language teaching. The module of Hungarian as a foreign language contains teaching methodology lessons in each semester, lessons visit several times during their studies and practice in the language class last two semesters.

At the end of the specialization course the students obtain an official certificate of the accomplished credits and fields of studies. Although the students do not become teachers of Hungarian as a foreign language they acquire knowledge which is useful in the

teaching practices regarding immigrant/foreign children and also expands the students' skills as a teacher through the additional subjects.

## 6. Survey on the course

In the autumn semester 2014, 42 students have started the specialization course. Before the start, the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire to get information about their motivations and plans relating to the course. 38 students participated in the survey, which contained 8 questions, mainly inquiring about the expectations of the students. In this paper, 5 of the questions will be examined.

### 6.1 Participants of the first semester

The course is available for all teacher professions at our faculty: for the kindergarten teacher trainees in the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester; for the primary school and the special education teacher trainees in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or the 5<sup>th</sup> semester. *Figure 1* presents distribution of the students by their profession:

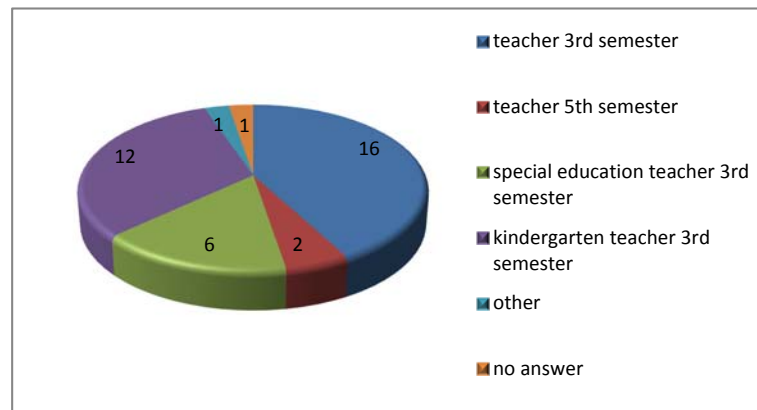


Figure 1: Distribution of the students by their profession

The most motivated groups were teacher trainees of the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester (16) and kindergarten teacher trainees of the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester (12). One of the members is a student of Faculty of Art learning visual arts.

### 6.2 Usefulness of the course

Two questions of the questionnaire inquired about the students' opinions regarding to the usefulness of the course. The question, whether the course will be useful for them, 33 students answered with *yes* but 5 of them *don't know it yet*. There was no significant group being uncertain (*Figure 2*):

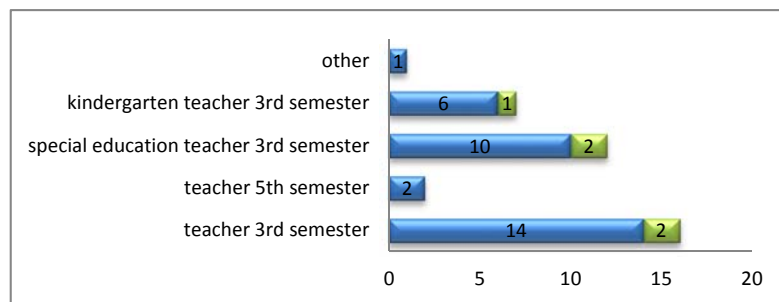


Figure 2: Opinion of the students about the usefulness of the course

Regarding the question how the students can use their new skills, they gave various answers; some of them even more than one answer (*Figure 3*). 12 of them proved themselves to be unsure: 8 of them



*did not answer* and 4 of them said they *do not know yet*; 6 of the answers suggest usefulness of the course working abroad. Most of the students want to work and use their skills in the field of HFL as a teacher: 8 of them generally in their work, 8 of them think they will meet immigrant children in their class, and 1-1 student announced a more specific answer: they will use their knowledge in a bilingual school, as a private teacher or as a HFL teacher.

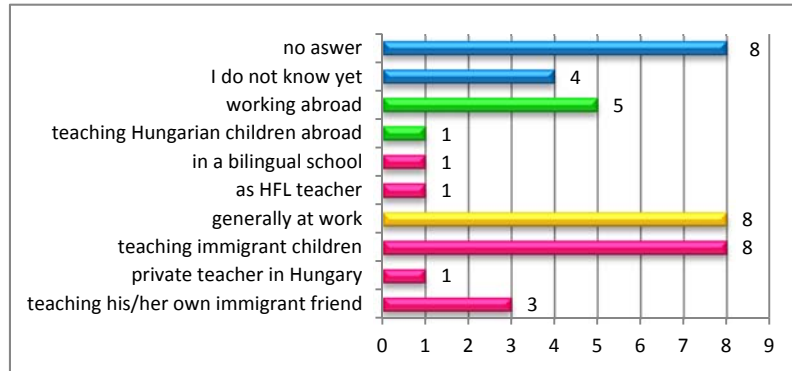


Figure 3: Potential fields of application according to the students

### 6.3 Plans for the future

Two questions in the questionnaire related to the plans of the students for their future life and work. For the question whether the students have a concrete plan regarding HFL profession, the answers of the students produced a balanced result between the answer *yes* and *I do not know yet* (Figure 4). 19 of the students (50% of the respondents) already have definite plans, while 16 of them do not know whether they would teach Hungarian as a foreign language. Special education teacher trainees proved themselves principally

uncertain: 8 of them said they *do not know yet* and 1 of them gave no answer.

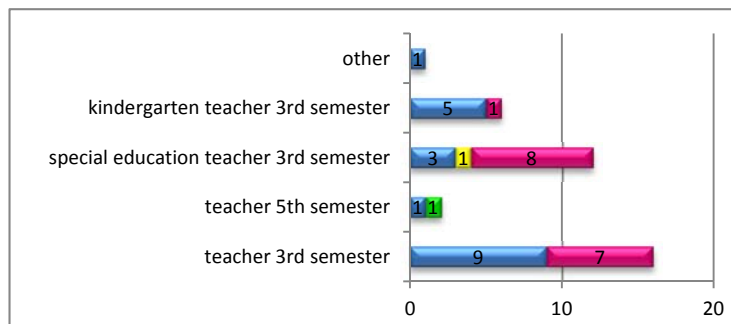
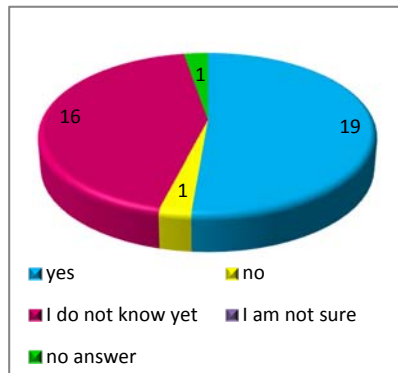


Figure 4: Plans of the students regarding HFL profession – general overview

The last question wanted to discover the plans for the future of the students in detail (Figure 5). 13 of the students seems to be unsure: 1 of the kindergarten, 5 of the primary school and 3 of the special education teacher trainees gave no answer for this question; 4 of the special education teacher trainees do not know it yet, whether they will ever work as a HFL teacher. 9 of the trainees imagine their life abroad: 3-3 of the kindergarten and the primary school teacher trainees want to go abroad to work; they plan to use these skills in

their work. 2 primary school and 1 kindergarten teacher trainees want to teach Hungarian to children abroad. 1 special education teacher regards this certificate as an advantage in job hunting. 3 of the teacher trainees mostly think about their future job in general terms (2 special education and 1 primary school teacher trainees). The remaining part of the respondents want to teach Hungarian as a foreign language as an HFL teacher (1 kindergarten and 1 primary school teacher trainees); teaching immigrant children (3 primary school and 1 special education teacher trainees); as a private language teacher (1 primary school teacher trainee) or teaching Hungarian to their own immigrant friends (1 primary school and 1 special education teacher trainee).

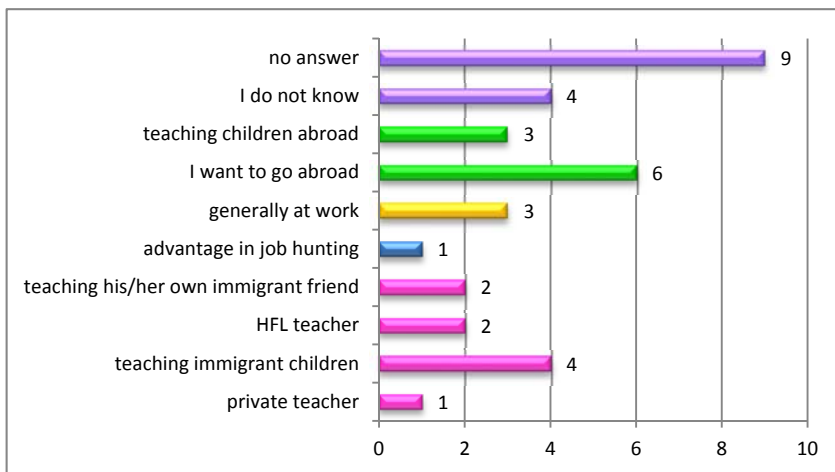


Figure 5: Future plans of the students as HFL teacher in detail

### 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are some data to consider and compare. On the one hand there is the surprising interest of the students towards the “Hungarian as a foreign language for foreign/immigrant children” specialization course. On the other hand the greater amount of

students is sure about the usefulness of the course, as explained by their answer in detail (28 students). Regarding the future of the students, 13 of them definitely want to work as a HFL teacher, 3 of them want to use their skills generally in their work and 7 of them consider this certificate as an advantage in the labour market in Hungary or abroad. These data confirm the legitimacy of the initiative and the value of this course.

The leadership of the faculty decided to offer this specialization course in the next academic year as well. If the course is met with sufficient interest on behalf of the students, the survey presented in this paper will be repeated in September again. At the end of the next academic year a follow-up survey is planned among the students who will complete the first two-year specialization course. The questions repeated in the follow-up survey – even the questions not mentioned in this paper - may give information about the improvement of the students in HFL, and about their better overview of their possibilities using this certificate.

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*Statistical Yearbook of Education 2012/2013*. Budapest 2013.