

Foreign Language Learning Experiences of Deaf and Severely Hard-of-Hearing Czech University Students ¹

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Abstract: This paper presents qualitative research on the experiences and opinions of four Czech native speakers learning English as a second language all of whom are either deaf or severely hard-of-hearing and are currently pursuing or have recently finished university studies in the Czech Republic. Within the framework of an international project, the two male and two female respondents were interviewed individually in order to get an insider's perspective on the needs, difficulties and preferred teaching and learning strategies of students with hearing loss. The descriptive-interpretative analysis of the data followed the principles of qualitative research and yielded four main themes: learning experience, motivation, teaching modality, and learning strategies and learner autonomy. The results highlight the importance of learning experience gained in primary and secondary education and the need for teachers who provide positive motivation for deaf learners and are fluent users of Czech Sign Language. The findings can enrich the knowledge of language teachers, teacher trainers as well as language policy makers and are transferable to similar contexts.

Key words: deaf, foreign language learning and teaching, motivation, learner autonomy, teacher education

Foreign language skills undoubtedly constitute an integral part of our lives both in the professional and in the private spheres. Colleges and universities all over the world, including China, the USA and Europe have introduced a foreign language (FL) requirement in their curricula making sure that future professionals in all fields of arts, science and technology have the linguistic

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means to communicate to one another and work effectively internationally. While most students have access to a wide variety of language learning opportunities, courses, methods, and materials to help them, some groups of students may still not have the right resources for their needs. Attention should be paid to students in higher education for whom learning a FL and taking the required proficiency exam represents a major challenge on their way to successful graduation. Learners with special educational needs (SEN) whose difficulties and struggles often remain undisclosed may require more tailored FL tutoring. A sub group of those with SEN are the deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) language learners in higher education. For a long time DHH persons were not thought of as people who could or would want to learn FLs (Mole, McCall, & Vale, 2008). Today the question has shifted from *why* teach them FLs to *how* to teach them effectively (Eilers-crandall, 2008). As part of a larger international endeavour to understand how FL teaching can be improved for DHH persons, we explore the experiences of four DHH university students in the Czech Republic. Individual case study interviews were used to investigate their language learning motivation, goals and experiences. The studies provided information that might be useful to language teachers, methodologists and course developers for FL learners with a hearing loss. The example of the four participants calls attention to the importance of language learning experiences at elementary and secondary levels and how it shapes university students' disposition to learning a FL.

1 Background

1.1 *Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing persons in the Czech Republic*

To place the example of the four research participants into a broader picture, this part of the paper will describe the situation of DHH persons in the Czech Republic with particular attention to language education. With a certain necessary degree of simplification due to the complexity of defining the terms regarding hearing loss (i.e. medical, social or functional perspective; age), the available statistics shows that there are about 86 500 people in the country with hearing loss (of 40 dB and above) out of which about 6 000 lost their hearing prelingually (Český statistický úřad, 2014).

The right to language education for this group was first recognized by the law in 1998, this was subsequently replaced by the act concerning sign languages and communication systems of deaf people (Act No. 384/2008,

2008). The Act guarantees DHH persons the right to use, be educated via, and learn in the communication systems of the deaf people, and the right for free interpreting at schools (elementary through university) under certain set conditions and to a certain degree. These preferred communication systems include Czech Sign Language (CzSL) and systems based on Czech (e.g. signed Czech, speech to text reporting, visualized spoken Czech and finger spelling).

1.2 The education of deaf persons in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic there are 16 schools for DHH students, with some covering a single education level and others multiple levels (i.e. pre-school to upper secondary). In agreement with the *Regulation No. 27/2016* and its amendment from 1. 1. 2018 (2017) DHH learners (as well other learners with SEN) can opt for education in a special school or for integration in a mainstream school. In recent years, the Czech Republic has followed the international trend of supporting the inclusion of SEN learners in mainstream education (MŠMT, 2018). All four respondents in our study, however, attended special schools before entering higher education.

Two important differences regarding the formal arrangement of special schools as opposed to mainstream institutions are class size and the length of study. In schools for learners with hearing loss, class size is set from between 6 to 14 students, and the elementary school includes ten instead of the regular nine grades, where the first grade curriculum is taught over two years. The objectives of education and the desired competences of education are specified in the *Framework Education Programmes (FEPs)* for primary and secondary educational levels since 2007 (MŠMT, 2017a; MŠMT, 2017b). FEPs articulate the same requirements and outcomes for learners regardless of hearing status. Learning English as a foreign language is covered in the educational area called Language and Language Communication, including the educational fields Czech Language and Literature, Foreign Language (FL) and Second Foreign Language. The required outcomes in FLs are specified using the definitions of the *Common European Framework for languages* (CEFR, Council of Europe, 2001). For the first FL these are A2 level at the end of the elementary school (grade 9) and B1 for the upper secondary school (grade 13).

The first FL is compulsory at the elementary level from the third grade, for DHH learners at special schools this can be moved to the fourth grade. The second FL is added from the eighth grade at the latest. In justified cases the school for DHH learners can choose to reinforce different subjects, such as

the Czech language or the first FL (this may also include CzSL) instead of the second FL. The same applies to the upper secondary level.

The above mentioned *Regulation No. 27/2016 (2017)* on the education of pupils with SEN and talented pupils also states that a school is required to provide for education in the communication system which corresponds to the learner's needs in the case of learners who use a different communication system than a spoken language. If sign language is not the communication system of all the participants of the particular educational process, the school should provide for interpreting. In addition, the law on pedagogical staff (*Act No. 563/2004, 2004*) articulates the requirement that proved knowledge of sign language is a necessary part of the professional qualification of teachers of learners who cannot perceive language through hearing.

To our knowledge, there is no published data available as to how far the financial and the staffing situation of individual schools goes to meet these legal requirements. For lack of official figures we had to resort to private discussions with practitioners from a number of schools for DHH learners. These conversations revealed that there are individual teachers with very little knowledge of CzSL among staff and the economic situation of the schools does not allow for employing a substantial number of interpreters and/or teacher assistants to cover all situations when interpreting is required.

Upper secondary level education is completed with a school leaving examination, which is also a necessary pre-requisite for entering tertiary level education. Adaptations of the exam for DHH learners are provided on three different levels according to the degree and character of their individual hearing loss (CERMAT, 2016). For learners with severe hearing loss, the adaptations of the FL exam concern both its form and its content. Apart from generally lowering the language level from B1 to close to A2, these include 100% time addition, the exclusion of the listening part, CzSL interpreting for instructions, wider possibilities of dictionary use, and the realization of the speaking part through online chat (CERMAT, 2016, p. 9).

1.3 FL requirements in tertiary education: support, accommodations or exemptions

The education of DHH learners at the tertiary level is regulated by the *Higher Education Act (1998)*, which includes the requirement to employ all available provisions to secure equal opportunities for students. As an example, here

we show how this theoretical requirement is operationalized in the case of the two largest state universities in the country: Charles University (CU) in Prague (Univerzita Karlova, 2017) and Masaryk University (MU) in Brno, (Masaryk University, 2014a; Masaryk University, 2014b). At CU there were 26 DHH students reported in 2012 (Hájek & Bojar, 2013, p. 137). MU reported 48 DHH students in 2017 (Řehořová, 2018, p. 32), which represents a drop from the peak year of 2009, when there were 100 DHH students enrolled (Basovníková, 2010, p. 30). Nonetheless, MU still attracts definitely the highest number of DHH students compared to other Czech universities.

CU (Univerzita Karlova, 2017) and MU (Masaryk University, 2014a; Masaryk University, 2014b) both proclaim that their aim is to provide equal access to education and comparable study conditions for learners with SEN. For DHH learners this is put into practice by providing services and support, such as making educational content and study materials accessible (e.g. editable electronic documents), providing for interpreting, transcription services and note-taking services, individual instruction, time compensation (additional time) during study and testing and in justified cases an individual study plan. The application of the necessary means of support should enable DHH students to fulfil the requirements, which are the same for all students.

A certain level of proficiency in a modern FL represents a compulsory part of university education in the Czech Republic. This generally means B2 as the minimum attested level of proficiency, though this may differ according to study programme. In order to help DHH students fulfil this requirement, both CU (Filozofická fakulta UK, 2015) and MU (Teiresias, 2018) offer special FL lessons which are organized in small groups with added time and according to a modified methodology.

1.4 Education of FL teachers for DHH schools

The above-mentioned law on pedagogical staff (*Act. No. 563/2004, 2004*) also contains the current guidelines for necessary qualifications of teachers in classes and schools established for learners with SEN. This is either a degree in Special Pedagogy with a focus on education or a degree in Special Pedagogy together with a degree in Education or additional educational training.

With a view to this requirement there are currently several possible educational pathways for teachers of FLs at special schools (or classes) for DHH learners if they are to be fully qualified. The first possibility is doing

a double major in Special Pedagogy and a FL. The second is a degree in a FL and an additional qualification in Special Pedagogy, which can be added within the first few years of employment at the school. The third option is a major in Special Pedagogy complemented with the additional study of the methodology of teaching a particular FL. For teachers of English, this is a one-semester supplementary English language teaching (ELT) methodology course for persons who already have a degree in education and can document their proficiency in the language at the C1 level. Personal inquiry at four different special schools for DHH learners showed that there is a close to even distribution of the various pathways among their FL teachers.

Despite the official requirements concerning the teachers' knowledge of CzSL, there is no clear pathway for training. Attaining proficiency in sign language does not generally form part of the Special Education curriculum at the bachelor or master level at the major Czech universities even if the specialization is teaching learners with hearing loss ("surdopedy"). Personal inquiries with several practitioners show that they have learnt CzSL individually, mostly paying for private tuition or courses. In 2014, Machová (2014, pp. 163–164) found that out of eight FL teachers at three different special schools no teacher fully qualified according to the current official guidelines, although most of them reported working on completing their education at the time of the interviews.

1.5 Research into the FL learning of DHH students

To date the amount of research into the FL learning situation of deaf and severely hard-of-hearing persons is limited. When considering how best to teach FLs to DHH learners, two markedly different viewpoints can be observed. Those whose work is dominated by the so-called *oralist* tradition in deaf education concentrate "on the development of speech, speech-reading and the use of residual hearing" (Moore, 2010, p. 21) both in the language of the majority society and in FLs (e.g., Domagała-Zyśk & Podlewska, 2019). An alternative viewpoint sees sign language as the first or dominant language (L1) of DHH students onto which the learning of all subsequent languages should be based and promotes the use of sign language as the main teaching modality (Eilers-Crandall, 2008; Kontra & Csizér, 2013; Mole et al., 2008; Pritchard, 2013). This latter viewpoint gained strong support from multiple studies that identified poor levels of reading and writing for many DHH

school leavers in the native language of the country they live in (Allen, 1994; Eilers-crandall, 2008; Holcomb & Payton, 1992).

A strong impetus was given to the inclusion of sign languages in education by such international documents as the *Salamanca Statement* by UNESCO (1994) and the *Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities* by the UN (United Nations, 2007). Scandinavian countries were the first in Europe to include sign languages in the FL teaching process in the late 1990s. Pritchard (2013), for instance, highlights the benefits of first acquainting Norwegian pupils with British Sign Language (BSL), by which their awareness to foreign languages is raised, their curiosity is evoked, and their metalinguistic skills are also developed by the time they encounter English in its spoken and written form.

Several authors have pointed out the undeniable difficulty of using a manual approach in FL education when the teachers themselves cannot sign and have to depend on an interpreter. This realization, for example, prompts Janáková to recommend that “the young generation of teachers of the Deaf should definitely learn sign language first” (2008, p. 60). Gulati (2016) describes how the use of an interpreter created a distance from her students, which eventually led her to learn Polish Sign Language (PjL) herself so that she could improve not only her teaching but also her rapport with her students. Fleming (2008) and her colleagues at Wolverhampton University have also developed a program to teach English to incoming deaf foreign students via BSL. They find that BSL constitutes an easy to learn common language that students from various parts of the world can immediately use for communication with one another, and it can also be used as the language of instruction in class. At Wolverhampton the decision was also taken to focus on teaching written English because what students most need for their studies are good reading and writing skills. In Hungary, subjecting non representative nation-wide survey data to cluster analysis Kontra and Csizér (2013) found a close relationship between sign language use and motivation to learn foreign languages.

1.6 Research in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic an attempt to foster the teaching of FLs to DHH learners at secondary and tertiary education levels was undertaken by Janáková and her colleagues et al. at CU. Two seminar workshops, in 2000 and 2004 brought together international researchers and teachers with Czech practitioners at CU in Prague to discuss both theoretical and practical

issues of deaf FL teaching and learning. These workshops unfortunately have not continued due to changes of staff and differing priorities.

Consequently, most recent Czech research-based studies in ELT for DHH learners include mostly theses. Besides a number of bachelor and master's theses which concern mostly practical issues such as motivation, teaching materials and students' previous ELT experiences at the elementary and secondary levels (see e.g. qualification theses with key words *deaf* and *English* at MU: <https://is.muni.cz/vyhledavani/?lang=en;search=deaf%20English;ag=th>), two doctoral dissertations have been completed in recent years (Machová, 2014; Sedláčková, 2016a). However, DHH learners in tertiary education have so far received limited attention (Fonioková & Sedláčková, 2013; Sedláčková, 2016b).

2 Method

In 2018, an international project entitled *Language Skills of deaf students for European mobility* was launched with the participation of Austrian, Czech and Hungarian teachers and researchers to explore the foreign language situation of DHH students in the participating countries and to develop methods, materials and immersion programs for students in higher education with the help of British experts. In the preliminary phase of the project, survey data were collected electronically, which was followed up by individual case study interviews with four students from each participating university using a qualitative approach (for details see Csizér & Kontra, in press). In this article, the information from the four Czech students is introduced.

The specific research question was: what can teachers of deaf and severely hard-of-hearing students of English learn from the experiences and individual pathways of four university students in the Czech Republic? By examining in detail four individual case studies, our research aim is to gain an insider's perspective and a deeper understanding of what it entails to learn a foreign language that one does not hear or does not hear well in a Czech teaching environment. Furthermore, we aim to come up with suggestions that could be implemented by teachers of English, their trainers, ELT methodologists and policy makers to improve the FL teaching for DHH individuals.

2.1 Participants

An opportunistic sample was used for the interviews. Some of the students volunteered to participate in further data collection when they filled out the electronic survey; other participants were recruited by their teachers of English. In line with the principles of qualitative research, an attempt was made to have an as varied sample as possible in terms of age, hearing status, and field of study. In the Czech sample the participants were 38, 35, 25, and 24 years old respectively. There were two male and two female students. Two of them were deaf, one hard-of-hearing and one was a cochlear implant (CI) user since the age of 17. Some of them were returning adult students working on a second or a higher degree. One student was studying accounting, two special education and one IT. Taking English classes was compulsory for each of them. In order to preserve their anonymity, they will be referred to by pseudonyms as Adel, Dana, Ludvik, and Pavel. For an overview of the details about the participants see Table 1.

Table 1

The Czech interview participants of the project

Name	Adel	Dana	Ludvik	Pavel
age	24	38	25	35
gender	female	female	male	male
self reported hearing status	Deaf	Deaf	CI (since age 17)	hard-of-hearing
language used in the interview	CzSL	CzSL	Czech	Czech & CzSL

2.2 Instrument

The instrument used was a semi structured interview guide with five loosely structured groups of questions tapping into the respondents' language learning history, their beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1987), their motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009), their preferred modality (that is speech, sign language, or written language) in FL education, and their language learning strategies (Oxford, 2013). A semi-structured format was used to make sure that key points were addressed in each interview to make the triangulation of the data possible while a degree of flexibility allowed participants to discuss at length issues they considered important or to bring new points into the discussion.

2.3 Procedure

The interviews were conducted by the second author with the help of interpreters (English – Czech, Czech – CzSL) on the premises of the students' institution. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The participants were free to choose the language of the interview themselves. Two deaf learners used CzSL with interpretation into English, one decided to use spoken Czech with interpretation into English, and a third asked for the interviewer's questions to be translated into CzSL but responded to them in spoken Czech, which was subsequently translated into English.

The interviews were each saved in both an audio and a video format and subsequently transcripts were made by the interviewer. The first author then checked and amended the Czech – English interpretation to make sure no information was lost in translation and everything was noted down accurately. The transcribed interviews were then given to the respondents for authorization. The finalized transcripts were subjected to qualitative content analysis looking for emerging themes. A conventional content analysis, where codes and categories were derived from the data (Hsieh & Shanon, 2005), was conducted by the two authors separately and then discussed before the analysis was finalized. The procedure was adopted as one of the measures to increase the research reliability (Švaříček et al., 2007).

3 Results

As a result of the content analysis four themes defined by the interview structure emerged as the most prominent: (1) Learning experiences; (2) Motivation; (3) Teaching modality; (4) Learning strategies and learner autonomy. Each of these themes is presented in detail using quotes in English from the transcribed interviews.

3.1 Learning experience

Each of the four participants was an active student of English at the time of the interviews, and although due to their age Dana (38) and Pavel (35) went to school a decade earlier than Adel (24) and Ludvik (25), they all had compulsory English at their respective secondary schools. Adel even had English for Specific Purposes (ESP) on top of classes in general English because she attended a vocational secondary school. As opposed to that, the participants' elementary school FL experience varied. Dana had no FL, Pavel

and Adel started compulsory English classes in the fifth and seventh grades respectively, and Ludvik was unable to recall whether his English classes from the eighth grade were compulsory or elective.

The English courses in the elementary school were characterized as focusing mainly on vocabulary with some structural input in the upper grades. Pavel recalled that the teacher used to show the class a picture and asked them what they saw in it, but it was just words and no sentences until the eighth or ninth grade. Ludvik had similar memories about his elementary school English classes: “Only basic words or basic syntax, more complicated sentences came at the secondary school” (Ludvik, p. 3). Adel experienced the same and explained that getting mainly just vocabulary input in the elementary school was a problem because they did not have a chance to practise the words: “we didn’t have much practice, practising the vocabulary,” she said (Adel, p. 3). Dana, who only started learning English in secondary school, also complained about having only been taught vocabulary:

I remember that I was quite bored in the lessons because we only learnt vocabulary, we had to look for, we had to translate alone in dictionaries. And we didn’t do any grammar. I only started that here at university when I started studying I was surprised that that there is grammar and that one has to learn it. (Dana, p. 4)

The experience our participants gained during school education seems very much teacher dependent. For Dana it was a very negative experience overall; she felt that her teacher did not care about the students, she was bad, she did not make them interested in English, which has had an effect on Dana’s attitude to learning the language until the present. Pavel, on the other hand, had good experiences with his teachers and enjoyed learning English. In secondary school, he assumed his teacher was so good because she was new on the job:

It was a very new teacher, she was very young, she’d just started, so you know, usually with new teachers the motivation and drive is right. I also enjoyed her approach very much; I liked her teaching and so on. (Pavel, p. 6)

Ludvik tried to make objective comments about his secondary school English teacher describing him as a “traditional” teacher but someone who nevertheless had an effective, systematic approach to teaching:

So at the beginning we checked homework, then he announced the topic of the lesson, for example he explained some rules of grammar, and afterwards he distributed some worksheets with exercises or questions. He distributed worksheets with various exercises, for example vocabulary gap fill or grammar practice. Then he set homework for us. Something like that. (Ludvik, p. 6)

The problem with this approach according to Ludvik was twofold: on the one hand it was boring, most of the students did not pay attention in class, and, on the other hand, there was no communication taught in class. Ludvik felt that in secondary school he learnt the basics but it was only at university that he got to the level when he was able to “communicate with English people or foreigners” (Ludvik, p. 7).

Adel was the one who gained both positive and negative experiences in secondary school due to the fact that they had both general English and English for Informatics. She was not very fond of her general English classes at first, but then a new teacher arrived who was “fantastic” (Adel, p. 5). As regards her ESP classes, she disliked English for Informatics owing to the specialized texts and the technical vocabulary. We can only speculate whether a different teacher using a different approach could have made the ESP classes more enjoyable for her.

3.2 *Motivation*

In Dörnyei’s definition, “[m]otivation explains why people decide to do something, how hard they are going to pursue it and how long they are willing to sustain the activity” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 7). In Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self-system theory the learners’ previous language learning experiences play an important role in fuelling their motivated learning behaviour or, in case of negative experiences, they can extinguish motivation completely. This latter phenomenon could be observed in the case of Dana. Her disappointing English language learning experience at secondary school left a permanent mark on her attitudes to English and English language learning, which she expressed as follows:

I was 16 when I started the secondary school, I was interested in learning another language, but if we had had at least a good teacher, I believe she could have made me interested in it, but this particular one was bad. And I think if I had got the basis at the secondary school, I would now have a better study, better understanding or feeling ... relationship towards English. (Dana, p. 5)

Although she knew she had to pass a B2 level exam in English in order to get her degree, and she admitted that the teaching of English was very good at her university, this was not enough to make her study harder. She talked about learning English with such words as “a problem,” “a loss of time,” a “struggle,” “we are forced,” and “it’s compulsory” (Dana, pp. 8–9). Since her field was special pedagogy, she did not feel that English was going to be necessary for her in her future career.

The other three participants, however, did see the practical benefits of English language skills quite clearly. Pavel was in informatics, so for him the use of English in his job was obvious. In his private life, he used it for playing computer games, for managing the events of his sports team, and for travelling. In the interview, he recalled how his elementary school English teacher had tried to motivate the children by using the example of travelling abroad: “Well, I’m sure he also said why we had to or should learn English, that we may travel abroad one day and we will be glad that we can communicate with someone” (Pavel, p. 5).

Ludvik, who besides studying also worked as a programmer, asserted that a receptive knowledge of English was necessary for his job “for reading some documents, technical documents,” he said (Ludvik, p. 3). At the same time, he admitted that he had hired a private tutor to help him improve his writing skills as well. He and his tutor were writing e-mails to one-another about various topics, which allowed him to revise vocabulary and syntax, and he said he learnt from the tutor correcting his mistakes. To illustrate the importance of writing abilities he mentioned that one time when he visited Britain, he used his writing skills for getting around by typing his questions into his mobile phone and getting a response in the same way.

Adel confirmed what Ludvik said. Although she maintained that English was not important for her job, it was necessary when travelling:

For example, when I arrive somewhere and ask where some hotel is and even with a basic knowledge, I should be able to understand when the person writes it down for me, so that I know how to get to the hotel. (Adel, p. 9)

She also knew she needed the language for getting information because there were more sources available in English. Furthermore, she used English in her voluntary work at the Deaf Youth Organization for organizing meetings, conferences and so on.

3.3 *Modality*

During their language learning history, our participants mainly experienced being taught via the oralist method, which basically meant that there was a hearing teacher who conducted the lesson orally and combined it with writing things down on the board. Dana for example described her English lesson with an oralist teacher as follows:

It was spoken language or written language because the teacher was hearing and she couldn't use sign language. So she spoke and we read her lips or she wrote on the blackboard. And I also remember that the teacher, for example, showed a Czech word to us, translated it into English and she wrote the pronunciation of the word. And that was all. That's how I remember it. (Dana, p. 4)

Pavel's elementary school teacher also used speech combined with writing at the school for hard-of-hearing children. He remembered that they had used a course book for hearing students but he could not recall having to do listening tasks. At secondary school the young teacher he had was already able to use CzSL a little, which meant a great advantage not only for his deaf classmates but also for Pavel who at the interview identified himself as hard-of-hearing:

Well, I think that for the deaf students, or even I wasn't wearing the hearing aid sometimes, as far as I remember I didn't wear it at the secondary school, and when the teacher could say it in sign language then it was definitely an advantage. (Pavel, p. 6)

The two younger participants, Adel and Ludvik had English teachers in primary school who knew a little CzSL. Ludvik recalled that his teacher "explained things using sign and he wrote on the board. He didn't speak" (Ludvik, p. 4). This teacher did not make the students speak either; they only had to read and write. Adel's elementary school teacher used sign language for "everything," she said "for all the communication in the lesson, during the lesson, and if we didn't understand, she wrote it down on the board" (Adel, p. 5). Writing was necessary partly because her teacher's CzSL skill was not at a very high level. The students were also allowed to use sign language in class; for instance, when they were reading a text, they were signing its meaning so the teacher could check their comprehension, and they also used sign language if they wanted to ask the teacher something. However, in secondary school, both Ludvik and Adel got teachers who did not know sign language:

I must say that the teacher didn't sign, he just wrote on the blackboard or spoke [...]. Sometimes we hard-of-hearing students helped with translating. And then at the uhm year 3 or grade 3 [= grade 11] we had an assistant and who interpreted. (Ludvik, p. 4)

Although Ludvik did not think he needed the assistance of an interpreter, he confirmed that for his deaf classmates "it was an asset" (Ludvik, p. 7).

In the first three years of secondary school (corresponding to grades 9–11 on a K–12 scale), Adel also had a teacher who used a CzSL interpreter or an assistant who was able to sign. It was a hard-of-hearing person whose job was to always explain what to do and to distribute the tasks. When asked which solution she preferred, having a teacher who was able to sign or having an interpreter in class, this is how Adel explained her answer:

It depends on the situation. If the teacher knows the sign language, it's better, but if the teacher knows just the basics of the sign language, then the interpreter is better. So from my point of view in these two situations it was better to have an interpreter there. (Adel, p. 6)

In their university English courses, none of the students had a signing teacher. They either used an interpreter or communicated with the teacher online, in writing. Since most of them took part in individual or very small group classes, they asserted that working with an interpreter did not constitute a problem.

3.4 Learning strategies and learner autonomy

The amount of data that emerged in this category is unexpectedly small. Since all the four participants were successful university students, two of them already working on a second degree, one could reasonably expect to find several indications of good language learning strategies and various manifestations of autonomous learning. This, however, was not the case. Dana as a demotivated learner did not seem to be looking for language learning opportunities on her own, and she did not try to find ways of making language learning easier for herself. For language teachers she recommended that they visualize the material for their learners by using not only pictures but also drawing sketches for explaining grammatical structures.

Pavel thought that the best way to learn a language was by going abroad. He said he knew of mobile phone applications for learning English, but he

admitted that he had not started using one yet. He was aware that reading English books was a good way of retaining one's knowledge, but he kept putting this off as well. Nevertheless, he checked the meaning of new words in an electronic dictionary and for understanding written texts, he sometimes used an online translator program.

Ludvik turned out to be a frequent and conscious user of an electronic dictionary, and in the following excerpt, we can see how the use of this cognitive strategy is combined with the metacognitive strategy of thinking about learning:

Not that I copy everything into the translator, right? I don't do that. [...] So, I read it and if I don't understand some word, I look this word up in an English-English dictionary, where the meaning is described. I try to improve my English this way. (Ludvik, p. 9)

To teachers of deaf learners Ludvik recommended learning to sign and visualizing the material as the best teaching strategies:

So certainly something visual, pictures help us, something we can see directly rather than something abstract. When the teacher talks a lot that doesn't help the student much, rather some writing or practising reading. Because the student needs to see something not hear. [...] If the teacher knew sign language, it would be better for the student because he could explain better how it works, what the rules are and so on. (Ludvik, p. 11)

The most autonomous language learner and most frequent strategy user in this sample was Adel. She said she was watching English videos with subtitles, and if she came across an interesting text in English, she read it. Based on her limited experience with American Sign Language (ASL) she also thought that learning ASL would be useful: "I think it would be helpful. Because I have this experience when I knew a sign in ASL then it was easier for me to remember the word, I connected the sign to the word" (Adel, p. 6).

To teachers Adel recommended that they create opportunities for the students to do pair-work or group-work so that it is not always just "the teacher talking to students but various activities" (Adel, 9, 11). This idea also occurred in the interview with Pavel, who argued for the teacher to use a more communicative approach quite enthusiastically:

[...]definitely, to work in groups, communication, some tasks, so that it is not a teacher and a student (here the respondent gestures with his hands to show the

teacher and the student opposite to each other, as in the frontal method) [...] group work, set a task for a group of three, a simulation of a real event, for example in England, not just the board or pictures, writing [...]. (Pavel, p. 9)

Even the least motivated participant, Dana, reflected positively on the chat program provided by the English teachers in her university program. So we can presume that once the students gain some experience and build confidence in using the language for communicative purposes in the sheltered environment of the classroom, they might look independently for further practice opportunities outside the classroom as well.

4 Discussion

When analysing the DHH insiders' accounts of their FL learning experience, one of the dominant topics, which winds through all four of the themes highlighted above, is the role of the teacher. The teacher-dependent perception of the FL experience is more or less pronounced in all the four interviews and seems to determine the participants' assessment of their previous FL learning experience, their motivation and attitude to FL learning, and it also exerts an influence on their development of learner autonomy and learning strategies.

The significance of the teacher for the learners' perception of their learning experience and learning outcomes seems clear from the participants' statements and supports existing research with hearing subjects (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). In the Czech context, for example, in a study on what determines students' assessment of classroom instruction, Čejková (2018) found that the teacher's general approach and actual teaching seem to be more important than whether the subject matter itself is interesting for the students. The participants in the present study repeatedly mentioned how various teaching practices influenced their motivation in their English language classes. This links well with research on the role of the teacher in motivating students published by Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), who have found significant correlations between teachers' motivational practices and the learners' engagement behaviours. According to the authors, teachers' motivational practices include stating the purpose of learning. The significance of the teachers' explaining the reason for learning English was stressed in our sample by Pavel both as something that influenced his

learning experience in a positive way and also as advice for teachers of DHH learners. On the other hand, another of our respondents, Dana failed to see the purpose in learning English, which had a strong negative impact both on her English language learning experience and its outcomes.

Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) also speak about the importance of teachers setting intellectually challenging tasks for enhancing their students' motivation. Next to the lack of purpose, it may have been the lack of intellectual challenge, which caused the negative perception of English language learning, particularly at the elementary school level. Teachers' failure to offer basic sentence structures or tasks with a communicative purpose to the students could easily have led to their lack of success in making the content of lessons interesting for their learners, although this is one of the basic principles of successful FL acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). As opposed to this, the participants gave positive accounts of being pressed to communicate in English using online chat in their university FL classes, and this we can consider as also contributing to students increasingly seeing the purpose of learning and practicing the individual components of the language.

The failure to create intellectual challenge is closely connected with the issue of the significance of teachers' expectations regarding their students' abilities. It has been shown by numerous studies that these tend to be low for DHH learners regarding their academic achievement (Gaustan, 1999; Sari, 2007; Thumann-Prezioso, 2005), which subsequently has a negative impact on their learning outcomes (Simms & Thumann, 2007). On the other hand, research has demonstrated a positive impact of teachers including personally challenging tasks on learners' motivation as well as achievement (Parault & Williams, 2009; Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Teachers low expectations can be related for example to Dana's feeling that her teacher did not care about the students because she did not challenge them. The importance of seeing the purpose in learning the language when using it for communication via online chat in the classes was pronounced by all the respondents.

There are naturally other factors which influence learners' motivation in FL learning besides teachers. One of them that can be connected to the participants' views is the value placed in the language learnt (Dörnyei, 2001). In this respect, Dana and Pavel appear on two opposite ends of the scale. Dana seemed to place little value in English for her life and did not seem to have any connection to the target language environment. Pavel, on the other

hand, saw the value of knowing English, which increased his motivation. This is in line with Herzig's (2009) results, who in her study of deaf multilingual learners found that the value placed on a language influences the motivation to use it and develop in it.

Regarding the language of instruction, the respondents' answers clearly show that sign language communication is preferred by the deaf learners interviewed. In this respect, the fact that this is guaranteed by law in the Czech Republic is definitely positive. Unfortunately, implementation of this law is complicated.

5 Conclusion

There are significant lessons to be learnt from the personal accounts of the four participating students. Teachers of DHH learners of English can see it confirmed that they play an extremely important role in the students' FL learning process. Their role includes first of all demonstrating the value of English language skills and also enhancing their students' self-efficacy beliefs by making them feel that they are capable of mastering the language. It is also the teachers' task to choose and develop appropriate methods for teaching English that take account of DHH learners' needs and abilities, and within this framework to give the students manageable yet challenging tasks. For deaf and severely hard of hearing students the teachers' knowledge of the local sign language is a fundamental part of their job not only because of the legal requirement, but also because the students need it for barrier free information transfer and for good student-teacher rapport. Finally, giving students tasks that enhance autonomous learning in practice is also of great importance so that students become capable of continuing learning English and maintaining their acquired knowledge without a teacher way beyond their university years.

Clearly, the teacher is not the sole actor in the educational process. The learner with his or her personal characteristics and involvement influences the learning process as well as the learning outcome just as much as the educational system and the environment where the process takes place. The present study, however, aimed particularly at giving voice to the learners and their perspectives.

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Zkušenosti neslyšících a těžce sluchově postižených vysokoškolských studentů s učením se cizímu jazyku

Abstrakt: Předkládaná studie popisuje kvalitativní výzkum, jehož cílem bylo získat vhled do zkušeností a názorů čtyř českých neslyšících či těžce sluchově postižených vysokoškolských studentů či absolventů s učením se anglickému jazyku. V rámci mezinárodního projektu byly se dvěma ženami a dvěma muži provedeny rozhovory, které poskytují osobní pohled na potřeby, problémy a preferované výukové a učební strategie studentů se ztrátou sluchu. Na základě deskriptivně-interpretativní analýzy dat provedené dle principů kvalitativního výzkumu byla identifikována čtyři hlavní témata: Zkušenosti s učením, Motivace, Jazyková modalita výuky a Učební strategie a autonomie. Výsledky výzkumu ukazují na význam zkušeností s výukou a učením se získaných na základní a střední škole a potřebnost učitelů, kteří důvěřují schopnostem neslyšících studentů a dokáží používat český znakový jazyk. Zjištění mohou být přínosná pro učitele jazyků a jejich odbornou přípravu stejně jako pro tvůrce vzdělávací politiky a jsou přenositelná pro podobné kontexty.

Klíčová slova: neslyšící, vyučování a učení se cizímu jazyku, motivace, autonomie studenta, vzdělávání učitelů