

HEADTEACHERS

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE INSTRUMENT AND THE RATIONALE

In this chapter the data comes from interviews with the headteachers. Firstly, the structure and the rationale of the instrument will be explained. Then the nature of the sample will be presented. This will be followed by a detailed description of the findings and the implications. Finally, conclusions will be drawn and recommendations made.

The Interview with the Headteachers

This was a structured interview, which consisted of 16 open questions and it was conducted by a member of the Baseline Study Team. It was conducted in Slovenian at a time previously agreed with the headteacher. Besides the set questions the interviewers could ask sub questions if they thought it was necessary in order to obtain a clearer picture.

The headteachers were asked why they applied for a language assistant, how the paperwork was dealt with, about the role of the mentor, how the language assistant performed inside and outside of the classroom, and which were the good points of having a language assistant.

The rationale for using a structured interview was that it would be less time-consuming for the headteacher than, for example, a questionnaire, and thus the Baseline Study Team would be certain of receiving the headteachers' views on the Scheme (see *Appendix 6*).

THE NATURE OF THE SAMPLE

The interviews took place in 31 schools and 31 headteachers were interviewed. It should be noted that at three schools there was more than one assistant and therefore the headteachers at those schools were answering the questions taking into consideration both of the assistants teaching at their school.

EXPECTATIONS AND RESULTS

Reasons for Applying for a Language Assistant

The first question that the headteachers were asked was why they had applied for a language assistant. The expected answer was that they had applied for an assistant because the possibility existed to get one or because it was suggested to them by language teachers. Contrary to our expectations, the results in *Table 9.1* show that only two of the

headteachers said that they had applied for the latter reason and only one mentioned that their school had applied for an assistant for the former reason.

As can also be seen in *Table 9.1*, it is encouraging that more than two thirds of the headmasters were aware that assistants helped to improve the quality of teaching, helped to develop new methods and introduce new ideas. About half of them believed that it was good for students and teachers to have the possibility of communicating with a native speaker, and seven of them believed that this led to a better knowledge of other cultures, tolerance and openness.

Table 9.1 Reasons for applying for a language assistant

	<i>No.</i>
<i>To improve the quality of teaching: offering help to teachers, developing new methods of work, bringing new ideas into the classroom</i>	22
<i>Communication with a native speaker</i>	15
<i>Getting to know other cultures and developing tolerance and openness towards them</i>	7
<i>School is specialised in languages</i>	2
<i>It was the wish of language teachers</i>	2
<i>Knowing the assistant beforehand</i>	1
<i>Because of a chance to get an assistant</i>	1

We¹ were interested whose initiative it was to decide for a language assistant. We expected that the initiative would have come from language teachers, which was true in the majority of cases. However, in more than a third of schools (13 out of 31) the initiative also came (or in some cases only) from the school management.

We wanted to know to what extent the headteachers' expectations at the time of the application had been met during the year. Apparently, their expectations were either completely fulfilled (77%) or partly fulfilled (23%). Only two reasons were given as to why they were only partly satisfied: assistants with no, or not enough pedagogical qualifications, or experience, or their adaptability to a new environment was low. It was suggested that one year of working together was too short for a teacher and an assistant to develop their potential to the fullest extent.

Paperwork

As paperwork and finding accommodation for the assistant are two very demanding and time-consuming tasks, we asked the headteachers who dealt with them. In 61% of cases the paperwork and accommodation problems were dealt with by the mentor in co-operation with other language teachers and school management. In 39% of cases only the school management was involved. We expected that mentors and the administrative staff worked in co-operation, which is supported by the headmasters' answers. As the administrative procedure for arranging residency and employment of a foreigner in Slovenia is complicated and time-consuming, we expected some problems. The majority of schools

¹ From now on in this chapter 'we' refers to the Baseline Study Team.

(71%) did have problems with this procedure. The headteachers reported the following problems as seen in *Table 9.2*.

Table 9.2 Reported problems in the paperwork procedure

	<i>No.</i>
<i>Too much bureaucracy</i>	11
<i>Obtaining residence permit and work permit</i>	10
<i>Incomplete documentation and documentation prepared too late on the side of the Ministry</i>	9
<i>Obtaining health insurance</i>	5
<i>Looking for an apartment and rent payment</i>	4

Mentor's Role

We wanted to discover how the mentor was chosen and we expected that the answers would show the criteria for choosing mentors. Unfortunately, this was not the case because the data only shows who suggested a mentor. It seems that teachers were willing to accept the role of mentor in 84% of cases as seen in *Table 9.3*.

Table 9.3 The way the mentor was chosen

	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Headteacher appointed the mentor himself</i>	4	12.9
<i>In mutual agreement with the future mentor and according to his/her qualities</i>	9	29.0
<i>Mentor volunteers</i>	5	16.1
<i>According to the interests and wishes in the Language Department</i>	12	38.7
<i>No answer</i>	1	3.3
<i>Total</i>	31	100

We wanted to find out the headteachers' view of the role of the mentors. We expected that the headteachers would be familiar with their mentors' work. The headteachers gave a variety of answers. As seen in *Table 9.4*, the majority of them mentioned advising and guiding, planning and organising, and helping the assistant resolve problems. Approximately the same answers were given by non-mentor language teachers.

It is interesting that only one headteacher believed that paperwork was the responsibility of the mentor. The majority do not see the paperwork as the responsibility of the mentor. It

should be noted that in fact as many as 61% of the mentors did the paperwork either alone or in co-operation with school management or other language teachers.

Table 9.4 The role of the mentor

	<i>No.</i>
<i>Advising and guiding the assistant at school, helping the assistant with socialising and overcoming the culture shock</i>	24
<i>Planning and organising the work of an assistant</i>	17
<i>Motivating pupils/students for lessons with the assistant</i>	3
<i>Helping with documentation</i>	1

We also wanted to discover whether the headteachers thought mentors needed training. In 73% of cases they said *yes*. However, it is surprising that on the one hand the headteachers expected mentors to be professional in advising, guiding, and helping the assistant as well as planning and organising his work, while on the other hand they did not suggest that training in these areas was necessary. Their suggestions for training can be seen in *Table 9.5*.

Table 9.5 Suggested types of training for mentors

	<i>No.</i>
<i>Meetings of all mentors to exchange experience and ideas</i>	8
<i>Mentors should be informed about the basics of their responsibilities</i>	3
<i>Only initial training</i>	6

As mentors have to do a large amount of work, from initial help to helping the assistant to settle in, to paperwork and to being of help throughout the year, especially in the assistant's first year in the country, we were interested how and if at all mentors were rewarded. 74% of the headteachers said the mentors were rewarded in some way, 20% said they were not, and two headteachers either gave an irrelevant answer or '*probably yes*' answer, respectively.

Those headteachers who did reward their mentors (74% or 23 headteachers) mentioned different ways of doing it as seen in *Table 9.6*.

Table 9.6 Ways of rewarding mentors

	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Occasional allowance for efficiency</i>	20	87.0
<i>Awarding points for promotion</i>	2	8.7
<i>Offering an excursion</i>	1	4.3
<i>Total</i>	23	100

Many headteachers (11) suggested that it was absolutely essential that mentors' work was formally recognised and rewarded. The possibilities to reward mentors within the existing school system did not exist, so the headteachers tried to find certain ways of rewarding them and they admitted this was not satisfactory.

Language Assistants' Performance in the Classroom

The headteachers were questioned as to what extent they were familiar with the assistant's performance in the classroom. The answers show that the majority of them (90%) were aware of the assistant's performance. If we compare these figures to those obtained in the assistants' questionnaires, we see that only around 70% of the assistants said that the headteachers were aware of their work in the classroom.

The headteachers said that they were informed of the language assistant's performance in the classroom through the means mentioned in *Table 9.7*.

Table 9.7 Source of information on assistants' performance in the classroom

	<i>No.</i>
<i>Classroom observation</i>	9
<i>Talking to the assistant</i>	5
<i>Talking to language teachers</i>	11
<i>Talking to the mentor</i>	4
<i>Talking to students</i>	1
<i>Talking to parents</i>	1
<i>Activities led and organised by the assistant</i>	2

We wanted to discover whether the headteachers knew whether the assistants were present in the classroom without the regular teacher. As the results show in *Table 9.8*, 51% of the headteachers thought that the assistant was teaching without the regular teacher present. Their answers can be compared to those of the other language teachers and the students

who did indeed share the same opinion. 64% of language teachers said they had left the assistant in the classroom alone, and 91% of students said that they had attended a lesson with only the language assistant present at least once.

Table 9.8 Whether the assistant is present in the classroom without the regular teacher

	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Yes</i>	2	6.4
<i>No</i>	15	48.4
<i>Partly/occasionally</i>	14	45.2
<i>Total</i>	31	100

Those respondents who said that the assistant was occasionally without the teacher in the classroom gave the following reasons: substituting a teacher or teaching in split classes.

School's Attitude to the Language Assistant

We wanted to find out how the language assistant was treated by the school as a whole. 90% of the headteachers considered that the assistant was a part of the teaching team, and these answers match the answers of other language teachers, 95% of whom considered the language assistant as a part of the staff.

One headteacher who did not consider the assistant as part of the team said that the assistant worked at their school only once a week. The other two headteachers did not explain their negative answers.

We wanted to discover whether the assistant was included in teacher-parent meetings. About a third of the headteachers included them, another third did not, and the final third included them in other aspects of school life, such as: *teachers' meetings, language department meetings, teacher-students meetings, and open days.*

We also wanted to know whether the headteachers were aware of the assistants' involvement in extra-curricular activities. We expected that the headteachers would be familiar with the assistants' extra-curricular activities and they actually were in approximately 90% of cases. The extra-curricular activities that the assistants took part in, are shown in *Table 9.9.*

Table 9.9 Assistants' involvement in extra-curricular activities

	<i>No.</i>
<i>School performances</i>	10
<i>Excursions</i>	10

Table continued overleaf.

<i>School publications</i>	7
<i>Language courses for teachers and students</i>	6
<i>Sports days</i>	6
<i>International co-operation with other institutions and schools</i>	5
<i>Cultural days</i>	4
<i>Debate club</i>	3

It should be noted that the headteachers, the language assistants and the students mentioned the same extra-curricular activities that the assistants were involved in.

Assistant's Contribution to the School's Image

The headteachers were asked whether the fact of having a language assistant had helped to promote the school. 87% of the headteachers were aware of the fact that language assistants also contributed to the image of their schools, although they had not given promotion of their school as a reason for applying for a language assistant.

We wanted to know if the headteachers had feedback from parents on whether they appreciated the school having a language assistant. 84% of the headteachers thought that the parents' attitude towards having an assistant was positive. Nonetheless, four headteachers (13%) did not have any information on this matter.

The Best Points of Having a Language Assistant

The last question asked the headteachers to enumerate the best points of having a language assistant in their opinion. *Table 9.10* shows their responses.

Table 9.10 Best points of having a language assistant

	<i>No.</i>
<i>Multicultural awareness</i>	12
<i>Conversation with native speakers</i>	11
<i>Students improve their knowledge of a foreign language</i>	8
<i>Teachers improve their knowledge of a foreign language</i>	8
<i>Improved quality of teaching</i>	7

Table continued overleaf.

<i>New methods and new ideas</i>	5
<i>Meeting students outside classes</i>	4
<i>Raising self-confidence of students</i>	2
<i>Promotion of Slovenia</i>	2
<i>Additional motivation for students</i>	2
<i>Extra-curricular activities, new projects</i>	2
<i>Helping teachers in the classroom</i>	2
<i>Substituting teachers</i>	1
<i>Meeting teachers outside school</i>	1
<i>Promoting school</i>	1
<i>Too early to evaluate</i>	1

As can be seen in *Table 9.10* headteachers thought that the good points of having a language assistant were that it encouraged multicultural awareness and gave the students and teachers the opportunity to improve their knowledge of the foreign language and to converse with native speakers.

CONCLUSIONS

- In almost two thirds of the cases the reason why the headteachers applied for an assistant was that they believed that the quality of teaching would be improved, new methods of work would be developed, and the language assistant would bring new ideas and help teachers.
- In most cases, the initiative for applying for a language assistant came from the Language Department.
- The headteachers' expectations concerning assistants were completely or partly fulfilled.
- More than half of the headteachers said that paperwork had been done, and the accommodation had been found by the assistant's mentor in co-operation with other language teachers and school management.
- Only about a quarter of the headteachers did not have any problems during the administrative procedure.
- In most cases the mentor was chosen according to the interests and wishes in the Language Department.
- The majority of headteachers mentioned advising, guiding and helping as the main role of the mentor.

- Three quarters of the headteachers believed that mentors needed training and they suggested exchanging ideas and experience.
- Three quarters of the headteachers said that they somehow rewarded their mentors.
- The majority of the headteachers were aware of their language assistants' performance in the classrooms.
- Half of the headteachers said that their assistants taught alone at least occasionally.
- The majority of the headteachers looked on their language assistant as part of their team.
- A third of the headteachers did include their assistants in teacher-parents meetings.
- Only two headteachers said that their language assistant was not involved in extra-curricular activities.
- The majority of the headteachers believed that language assistants helped to promote schools.
- The majority of the headteachers said that the attitude of parents towards having a language assistant was positive.
- The best thing about having an assistant was that they helped to raise cultural awareness and that students could converse with native speakers.
- According to the headteachers, mentors had a lot of additional work concerning assistants, which exceeded their job description as teachers.
- They were aware that the status of mentors was not officially acknowledged and rewarded.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ The role of the mentor should be formally recognised, a job description should be written and non-mentor teachers should be informed about it.
- ❖ The administrative procedures should be simplified.
- ❖ The kind of training mentors need should be established.
- ❖ The headteachers' suggested that an assistant should stay at the same school more than one year.