

EDUCATIONAL HERITAGE IN THE CHILDHOOD OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION

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The deaf and hard-of-hearing population in Slovenia has a lower level of education than other vulnerable groups and any measures in this area call for a comprehensive analysis. The purpose of the paper was to investigate the participation in formal education of deaf and hard-of-hearing adults and their experiences in childhood, which (negatively) influenced further education. The paper combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies. We sent an online survey to all the providers of adult primary and secondary education in order to learn about the participation of this population in education. This was followed by a focus group of experts and interviews with deaf and hard-of-hearing adults. Three categories of reasons for non-participation in adult education have been identified: negative experiences of previous schooling (difficulties in achieving educational goals and feeling unaccepted), low support from family and the wider environment, and objective reasons (inadequate knowledge to continue schooling). We conclude the paper with some suggestions.

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Ključne besede:

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IZOBRAŽEVALNE IZKUŠNJE V OTROŠTVU GLUHIH IN NAGLUŠNIH TER NJIHOV VPLIV NA UDELEŽBO V IZOBRAŽEVANJU ODRASLIH

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Gluhi in naglušni prebivalci v Sloveniji so nižje izobraženi od drugih ranljivih skupin, morebitni ukrepi na tem področju kličejo po celoviti analizi. Namen prispevka je bil raziskati udeležbo v formalnem izobraževanju odraslih gluhih in naglušnih ter njihove izkušnje v otroštvu, ki so (negativno) vplivale na nadaljnje izobraževanje. Prispevek je kombinacija kvantitativne in kvalitativne metodologije. Vsem ponudnikom osnovnošolskega in srednješolskega izobraževanja odraslih smo poslali spletno anketo, da bi spoznali udeležbo te populacije v izobraževanju. Spoznanja smo nadgradili s fokusno skupino strokovnjakov in intervjuji z gluhih in naglušnih odraslimi. Prepoznali smo tri kategorije razlogov neudeležbe v izobraževanju odraslih: negativne izkušnje poprejšnjega šolanja (težave pri doseganju izobraževalnih ciljev, občutek nesprejetosti), nizka podpora družine in širšega okolja in objektivni razlogi (neustrezno znanje za nadaljevanje šolanja). Prispevek zaključujemo z nekaterimi predlogi.



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1 Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right that enables the acquisition of knowledge and skills for a quality, successful and fulfilled life. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991), education is free and the state creates opportunities for citizens to acquire an education. Individuals who did not acquire adequate education during childhood and youth can acquire it during adulthood. Adult education is defined in the UNESCO Declaration “Marrakech Framework for Action” as a human right that empowers the individual to become an active and global citizen (UNESCO, 2022a). The Declaration encourages all countries to set high goals for adult education in their national documents, as well as to support the participation of all residents, especially vulnerable groups, and thus to achieve the greater efficiency of systems, inclusiveness and justice. The fundamental message of UNESCO's Fifth Global Report on Adult Education and Learning (UNESCO, 2022b) is that it is necessary to reach those most in need of education throughout the world, especially those who achieve the lowest level of education. This message is very relevant for the deaf and hard-of-hearing population, as adults with reduced hearing have a lower level of formal education than the hearing population worldwide (Rydberg et al., 2009). Their knowledge and skills are also lower (OECD, 2016).

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023), 432 million people or 5% of the world's population have hearing problems. Of these, 34 million are children, and more than 400 million are adults. The WHO predicts that by 2050, there will be 900 million people living with hearing loss in the world. Therefore, the education of the deaf and hard of hearing is a challenge of the future and it is not just a statistical indicator, but an important political concept (Santos et al., 2020). In the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008), disabled persons, including deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, must be properly included in the general education system and must also be offered individual support. Slovenia, which is a legal and social state, pays special attention to ensuring the equal enjoyment of all the human rights and freedoms of disabled people (Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, 1991). The fundamental goals of the country are: training for independent living, lifelong learning, quality living with appropriate support and maintaining the social inclusion of disabled people (ZSVI, 2018).

In the European area, there are different concepts and paradigms of education for deaf and hard-of-hearing residents, which are mostly classified into three categories: bilingual-bicultural education, auditory-oral and auditory-verbal education, and a combined approach.

According to the first concept, bilingual-bicultural education, deafness is a cultural rather than a medical issue (Rydberg et al., 2010). Knowing sign language at an early age should enable the deaf and hard of hearing to express themselves easily in a language they can use, which would contribute to their optimal cognitive and emotional development. According to the authors of this concept, deaf education should begin with learning sign language, followed by learning written and spoken language. Written and spoken language and sign language are equivalent. The authors highlight two separate realities: the reality of the deaf and the reality of the hearing. At the institutional level, the realisation of this concept is manifested in special schools or departments for individuals with hearing impairments, which can be found in Sweden, the USA and some other EU countries (Rydberg et al., 2010).

In contrast to this is the concept of auditory-oral and auditory-verbal education, where it is argued that deafness is a medical and not a cultural issue (Dammeyer and Stein, 2021). The education of the deaf and hard of hearing should come very close to the education of hearing individuals and encourage the use of spoken language. To facilitate understanding and communication with the wider environment, the deaf and hard of hearing should first learn to read the lips of the speaker. Speech training or oralism plays a particularly important role in the education of the deaf and hard of hearing. Oralism is seen as an alternative to the concept of bilingual education, and its advocates oppose the use of sign language in regular schools (Dammeyer and Stein, 2021).

An intermediate solution is the concept of combined education, where the use of means of communication that are the most appropriate in a given environment should be encouraged (Edwards, 2012). In education programmes where this approach prevails, lip-reading, the use of sign languages, gestures, fingerspelling and body language are encouraged. The aim of this approach is to optimise communication skills using combined means that are most suitable for each individual in a certain environment or period of life. It is a concept that is widely

used today in educational institutions in Norway, Denmark, France and Sweden (Edwards, 2012).

It is not known exactly what the educational level of deaf and hard-of-hearing residents in Slovenia is because there is a lack of statistical data that would give a picture of the situation. Experts state that this is at a much lower level compared to the hearing population (Juhart, 2023). Early school leaving is associated in the literature with lower writing skills, a higher risk of unemployment, lower opportunities on the labour market and increased marginalisation in society (Možina, 2000).

Formal education of deaf and hard of hearing children in Slovenia takes form of integration or inclusion (the inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing people in a regular form of education, which can be complete or partial) and segregation - participation in specially designed programmes for deaf people, which take place in special schools: The School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Ljubljana; the Centre for Communication, Hearing and Speech, Portorož; and the Centre for Hearing and Speech, Maribor.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing adults can acquire knowledge and skills for obtaining a higher educational level together with hearing participants. They do not have the opportunity to participate in the segregated approach as these institutions only offer formal education to children and adolescents. Adults therefore acquire formal education either at adult education centres that offer primary and secondary education programmes, or at educational institutions that offer secondary education and have a department for adult participants.

Few sources examine how the educational experiences in the childhood of the deaf and hard of hearing influence their education in adulthood. The processes that take place in the school environment, at home or in society, which influence their education in adulthood, are rarely studied. Our assumption is that experiences during regular schooling significantly explain the decisions of deaf and hard-of-hearing adults on education.

The goals of this paper are to:

- present the level of participation of deaf and hard-of-hearing adults in primary and secondary education programmes;
- explore impact of the environment, experiences and events during regular schooling on the decision on education in adulthood;
- use results of this study to form suggestions for the empowerment of the deaf and hard-of-hearing in the context of education.

This paper is based on quantitative and qualitative research methods meaningfully complementing each other. Due to the relatively low education level of the deaf and hard of hearing, we first wanted to gain insight into the participation of the deaf and hard of hearing in adult education. The research question of the quantitative research therefore was: "To what extent do deaf and hard of hearing adults participate in primary and secondary education programs?" For this purpose, we created a detailed survey questionnaire and sent it to providers of adult education at the primary and secondary levels.

The aim of the qualitative research was to explore the impact of the environment, experiences and events during regular schooling on the decision to pursue education in adulthood. We divided it into several research questions:

1. How well was the school environment prepared for teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing children in the past?
2. To what extent was the family environment of the deaf and hard-of-hearing children favourable to education?
3. How does the education of the deaf and hard of hearing proceed in adulthood?

2 Method

2.1 Quantitative research

Participants

Quantitative research was conducted among providers of formal adult education programmes: both primary, offered by adult education centres (n=34) as well as secondary schools with a department for adult education (n=83).

Measures

Adult education providers were given short questionnaire to establish whether they had educated deaf or hard-of-hearing people in the last five years, how many there were, and how adult education centres are prepared to teach this vulnerable group, as well as what obstacles they encountered in doing so.

Data collection and data analysis

Adult education providers received online questionnaire via email to at least two addresses: to the manager and to the secretariat. If more than one answer was received from one institution, answers were integrated. Careful analysis of the data followed. No statistical analysis was needed due to the fact that not many deaf and hard of hearing participated in their adult education programmes.

2.2 Qualitative research

Participants

Table 1: Sample of the qualitative research

INTERVIEWS	FOCUS GROUP
I1 - a 74-year-old deaf man, profession: locksmith (3-year secondary vocational school)	FS1 - expert on deaf-blind people
I2 - a 42-year-old deaf man, education: Master of Economics	FS2 - expert from the Association of Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
I3 - 43-year-old deaf man, profession: computer technician	FS3 - professional from the Association of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Societies
I4 - 69 years old deaf woman, retired	FS4 - interpreter
I5 - 45-year-old deaf woman, profession: confectioner (3-year secondary vocational school)	FS5 - interpreter
I6 - deaf man, profession: computer technician (4-year secondary school)	FS6 - representative of a company that prepares deaf and hard-of-hearing people for employment
I7 - deaf man, profession: graphic designer (4-year secondary school)	FS7 - representative of the Employment Agency

Results of quantitative analysis lead to in-depth analysis of the reasons for the non-participation of the deaf and hard of hearing in formal adult education. For this purpose, interviews with deaf people were conducted to learn their stories. In order

to facilitate an understanding of the educational experiences, life and work of the deaf and hard of hearing, we also held a focus group of key stakeholders in education that work with this vulnerable group (see Table 1).

Measures

All interviews were asked about their adult education needs and experiences. If none, their life story, especially their family (deaf or hearing family members) and educational history became important. In focus group different stakeholders were asked about reasons for nonparticipation of deaf and hard of hearing in adult education, their needs, obstacles, challenges. Also specific questions were asked in a focus group: members of employment office were asked about the employment process of deaf and hard of hearing; employees were asked about their experiences with deaf and hard of hearing employees and if they were sent to any kind of education or training; interpreters were asked to describe situations when they were needed by deaf people and if education process was one of them; education providers were asked about deaf and hard of hearing participants and providers' readiness to educate this particular group of participants.

Data collection and data analysis

Interviews took place in autumn 2022 with the help of translator since all of our interviewees were deaf. Afterwards, in October 18, 2022 focus group was conducted. All the interviews and focus group were recorded and transcribed; the material was then edited and coded (Kordeš and Smrdu, 2005). There was a separate analysis of the interviews and focus group conducted by the same steps: editing the transcripts, open coding, determining relevant themes and categories (Mesec, 1998); interpretation was integrated through three research questions.

3 Results

3.1 Participation of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Formal Education Programmes

Within the first objective of the paper the level of participation of deaf and hard-of-hearing adults in primary and secondary education programmes were examined.

There was 100% response rate from the adult education centres. Their answers showed that this group did not attend primary school education as adults¹ at all. Directors of adult education centres, education organisers, consultants and teachers gave their opinion on the reasons for non-participation.

The directors and organisers mainly focused on the systemic reasons for the non-participation in primary school education programmes. They pointed out the lack of additional help and resources, insufficient cooperation with associations for the deaf and hard of hearing, as well as with employers of these groups. They also pointed out the lack of teaching staff to work with the deaf.

Teachers who have worked with this vulnerable group agreed with explained systemic reasons of their superiors, but highlighted concrete proposals that would empower them to work with this group. They were self-critical, feeling that they were not well prepared to work with this vulnerable group, and they expressed a desire for additional training.

The analysis showed that there were no deaf or hard-of-hearing adult participants in secondary education offered by specialised schools for the deaf and hard of hearing in Ljubljana, Maribor or Portorož. There were 12 adult participants of secondary education programmes from this group in adult education centres and high schools with a department for adults (table 2).

Table 2: Deaf and hard of hearing adult participants in adult education centres and high schools with a department for adults.

High school programmes	Four-year professional education programmes	Three-year vocational education programmes	All participants
2	6	4	12

Despite the evidence (table 2) considerable educational activity that could increase the educational level of these adults is missing. Deaf and hard-of-hearing students participated more in programmes organised by high schools than in high school programmes at adult education centres.

¹ Due to the non-existent number of deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in the primary school education program, presentation in the form of graphs or tables was not possible.

3.2 The Influence of the Environment, Experiences and Events During Regular Schooling on the Decision to Pursue Education in Adulthood

Three key questions of the qualitative research focused our analysis: how well was the school environment adapted to deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils in the past; what kind of encouragement and support did they receive from the family and how is the education of the deaf and hard of hearing proceeding in adulthood?

Transcripts were edited and carefully analysed; open coding was implemented to get an overview of the gathered material (Table 3).

Table 3: Categories, themes and codes of interviews and focus group

Themes	Categories	Codes
School environment	School environment	regular/specialised schools: different standards; sign language not used (teachers, pupils); needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils often not recognised
	Teachers	support, inflexibility and unresponsiveness
	School consultants	Lack of support
	Peers	Help from classmates, social exclusion
Family	Support	Reading books, additional explanation
	Lack of support	Fear of child's discrimination and social exclusion, guidance into easy study programmes (seamstress, locksmith)
Adult education	Formal	Non-existent, not motivated, lack of support, educational aspirations not met
	Nonformal	Mostly in NGOs for deaf and hard-of-hearing, some organised by employers

With the research question "How well was the school environment prepared for the teaching of deaf and hard of hearing children in the past?", we were interested in whether educational institutions took into account the specifics and needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals and to what extent (if at all) they adapted the educational process. The experiences of today's adults differ depending on whether they attended primary school in specialised institutions or through integration.

Learning sign language today is a matter of the free decision of the individual, regardless of the degree of hearing impairment. Sign language made it easier for these children to communicate with each other, but studying in those institutions caused

problems in the outside world either for them when entering regular schooling or when getting a job. Education in institutions for the deaf and hard of hearing does not meet the same standards as regular primary schools, which makes difficult for students to continue their education:

And then my parents realised that this school was not suitable for me. The school programme was too easy. I practically didn't learn anything. I remembered what I heard at school. I automatically solved all the tests quickly. The teaching material lagged behind the material in the regular schools. (16)

Those who completed primary school at institutions adapted for the deaf and hard of hearing had great difficulties when entering a regular high school:

And in this elementary school, in the first semester when I joined the new school, it was a culture shock for me... (16)

I was among the deaf in primary school and there was an easy system. Then I went to secondary school, but it was a completely different system. I experienced a shock. I used to do the transcriptions, but high school was a more difficult system and there was no interpreter, etc. (15)

As a result, many could not complete more than a three-year vocational school.

Among the reasons for the difficult adaptation to the new conditions was the difference between sign language and the spoken and written word:

Because sign language is composed differently than the written word. Even the sentence structure is reversed, to put it in a native way. They also have sign language thinking. They dream in sign language. Sign language is the basis for them. (FS5)

The next factor, which some have identified as an obstacle and others as an incentive, is the qualification of teachers. Well-trained and inspiring teachers can significantly support, encourage or motivate an individual in the educational process. The reverse is also true. If the teacher does not recognise and take into account the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing, it can make it very difficult for these students to go to school and can lead to severe traumatic experiences for them. However, to help the deaf, teachers and other professionals need specific skills. During the interviews, the hearing-impaired repeatedly reported negative experiences due to low qualifications, inflexibility in teaching and unresponsiveness. The following quote

draws attention to the extreme inflexibility of the Slovene teacher in assessing knowledge:

we also had dictation in the Slovene course. Everyone had to write it and the teacher evaluated how well you listened and how well you wrote. I mostly had blank paper., because of that I had to repeat this course. (13)

The inflexibility of the implementation of the educational process was also shown when the teacher's position during the explanation, which enables lip-reading, was not taken into account. Hearing loops and other aids were not always available, so students were completely dependent on whether the lecturer was facing the class or not. We also identified situations where teachers were not aware of the disabilities of children in the class. That's why they were punished in the past, both with inadequate grades and physically:

In the second grade... the teacher beat me. Because she thought that I wasn't following the lesson because I wasn't paying attention, I wasn't listening to her explanation. Which was almost impossible because I couldn't even hear it. She didn't see it, she didn't understand it, and she was beating me to make me pay attention... that I wasn't dreaming or something. (13)

These experiences were undoubtedly unstimulating for every learner who experienced them. Learning a foreign language also posed a special problem for the deaf and hard of hearing:

I was not excused even for, say, a foreign language, English. In English, I not only had to write and read, but I also had to speak English. We deaf and hard of hearing people already have problems with pronunciation in Slovenian, let alone in English. (13)

Individuals with special needs, especially the deaf and hard of hearing, are disadvantaged in this area. This could result in finishing school very early. Others were more persistent and achieved their educational goals with support, though rarely felt any satisfaction when acquiring new knowledge and skills, more ambitious educational goals.

In addition to teachers, school counsellors have to be properly qualified to work with the deaf. Of course, their role is extremely important not only in organising learning assistance, but also in guiding, advising and monitoring individuals after completing their education.

Yes, I would (note: continue her education). But I had no one to show me the way. To move on. Then I slowly got used to being at work (14).

Most of our interviewees had no help in the school environment, no one empowered them to follow their educational and professional ambitions, they received no other advice. Regardless of which path they choose, the role of the counsellor in guiding the individual is precious.

Social contacts are also an integral part of schooling. The role of the peer group is important for every individual, especially for those with special needs who, due to their specifics, are less independent, more vulnerable and less integrated into the school environment. The role of peers can be valuable both in terms of assistance and in a social sense. Deaf and hard-of-hearing people cited positive and negative experiences in this respect.

The interviewees described feelings of loneliness in the school environment in the following way:

Yes, I wanted company, but no one could help me there. I know it is not my classmates' duty to help me. But I was alone. And I didn't have any help, even from the school or the counsellor. For example, someone asking me how I was doing, how I was feeling... there was nothing like that. (15)

Those who were successful in the education system emphasised the importance of the help of their classmates:

I mostly had to correct grades. Only after I got the first test did I remember what went wrong, what I didn't understand, and then I asked my classmate to explain it to me. We...studied together. (13)

Regarding the second research question: "To what extent was the family environment of the deaf and hard of hearing encouraging for education?" analysis showed that the success of children during regular education was highly dependent on the help and support of family members. Each of our interviewees has a different experience of acceptance in the home environment and help from parents and other family members. It is true, however, that deaf parents were not always able to help their children on their educational path, as they were marked by their own negative experiences from schooling and employment.

Deaf children from deaf families have no ambitions and no desire for education, even though they are highly intelligent and capable. Why are deaf parents pessimistic? Because of their experience and because they themselves did not receive the understanding and support needed to realise their ambitions. They are also aware that they will not be able to help the child... (FS2)

Deaf or hard-of-hearing children of hearing parents sometimes received exceptional support and help from parents who were aware that their children needed more help in the schooling process than other children.

The first week..., I couldn't follow the lessons. My parents wanted to provide me with knowledge and information in every possible way, so they bought a tape recorder. My mother then took notes from the lectures, regardless the extremely poor quality of the recordings due to noise. (18)

However, not all experiences are positive: some felt that their parents were ashamed and hid their children's deafness - as a result, these children did not receive the necessary help and support during schooling, and they experienced trauma even before attending school.

The third research question was: "How does the education of the deaf and hard of hearing proceed in adulthood?" Most interviewed deaf people were not inclined to achieve higher education. Negative experiences certainly marked them or at least demotivated them when setting higher educational goals, as they expected less understanding of the educational material even in adulthood.

The analysis showed that there are also other reasons for the low level of participation in organised educational activities, in addition to the very negative experiences during regular schooling, for example, the lack of awareness of many actors in the environment (employers, professional workers in education, designers of educational programmes, or consultant workers). We also noticed a lack of advisory support, both in educational institutions and more widely in employment agencies, in companies where deaf and hard of hearing people are employed and in society in general.

Most of our interviewees had different professional and educational aspirations to those achieved: for example, I4 wanted to study geology and she arranged for an internship at the Geological Institute, but she was not accepted because of her

deafness. Then she started working as a seamstress. She wanted to further her education, but there was no one to advise her and show her the way.

Then I started a family, I had a child. There was no time in between. There was no chance. After several years of work, I didn't know where to go next. (14)

Another interviewee wanted to continue her education, but couldn't due to her hearing problems:

The knowledge I got was not enough for me and I lost my will and motivation because I had to rewrite a lot, I just watched and it wasn't for me. (15)

Retired deaf interviewees were not interested in furthering their education, but they believe in importance of education for young people today.

Our further inquiries revealed that some deaf and hard-of-hearing adults participate in non-formal education and training organised within deaf associations, cultural institutions or at the workplace.

I would also like to say that I also attended training courses for adults that are not of a professional nature. For example, cooking workshops and lectures within the framework of the Slovenian Society for Celiac Disease, round tables, conferences.... (12)

During the interviews, we noticed a high level of participation in the lecture organised at the association's headquarters.

4 Discussion

In this paper, we focused on the education and experiences of the deaf and hard of hearing in childhood and their influence on the decision to pursue education in adulthood.

In the theoretical part, the dominant concepts of formal education for the deaf and hard of hearing people in the European countries were presented: bilingual-bicultural education, auditory-oral and auditory-verbal education and concept of combined education. These concepts have their advantages and disadvantages. Rydberg et al. (2010) emphasises that knowing sign language enables deaf people to

express easily, however this group will find it more difficult to integrate into a world that is not adapted to their needs and specifics during adulthood. According to Dammeyer and Stein (2021) auditory-oral and auditory verbal education is very close to education of hearing people, however rarely fully realised in learning environments that are not primarily intended for the deaf. Edwards (2012) advocates the combination of communication skills most suitable in certain environment, but is aware that the combined education relying on different approaches reduces the quality of both languages.

Research has shown that there is no single, definitive concept that would be most appropriate in European countries. State systems have their own characteristics, traditions and experiences in this area, and this diversity is positive because it takes into account the specificities of the environment and the groups. However, diversity is not unique to Slovenia. In Slovenia, there is one predominant model of formal adult education (most similar to auditory-oral and auditory verbal education) and there is no possibility for greater integration of deaf and hard-of-hearing people with regard to formal education.

Analysis of the data to the first research question showed that deaf adults do not participate in primary school education programme at all. Some of them have been identified in secondary education programmes, but not enough to meet the needs of this group to obtain a higher level of education. In this article, some systemic, institutional or individual reasons for the lack of educational participation have been mentioned, but the focus of the study were the reasons that show how experiences from childhood influence education in adulthood.

We explored reasons for low educational participation of this particular group with interviews with deaf adults and focus group with other relevant stakeholders. Their experiences in early childhood undoubtedly influenced their educational preferences even in adulthood: the educational environment during regular schooling; specific experiences with peers during regular schooling; experience of education in special institutions; and family environment.

Deaf and hard of hearing adults who were educated in specialised institutions had fewer problems with acceptance in the environment than students in integration, but had much greater problems when finishing school. It was more difficult for them to adapt to the educational, working and wider social environment.

In the qualitative research some positive experiences in the implementation of the educational process, evaluation, counselling and support have been identified. For some deaf adults, the period of childhood was an opportunity to learn different skills, get to know a specific reality and prepare for later implementation in social life, work, and society in general. Positive, and sometimes also some negative experiences, enable even greater engagement of the individual, whose achievements at work or in the field of education were also highlighted in the article.

The consequences of educational failure lead to the suggestions that create conditions for lifelong learning for this group.

a) When planning and implementing programmes for deaf and hard-of-hearing adults, it is necessary to take into account their needs, interests, specifics and previous experience. This requires exceptional awareness, sensitivity and flexibility on the part of programme designers, teachers and other professionals. Kavkler (2010) pointed out that it is a particular problem that adults who re-enter formal forms of education find it difficult to make up for educational deficits from their youth education and that adults who did not gain positive educational experiences in their youth are rarely motivated for education in adulthood.

b) When conducting the training, it is necessary to provide learning assistance to all deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in accordance with the individual educational plan. It is also important to define a support network consisting of programmes and activities: additional attention should be paid to their educational needs, not only from the point of view of learning support, but also from the point of view of helping them overcome obstacles arising from social disadvantage.

c) It is necessary to offer various forms of professional training to teachers and other professionals of hard of hearing adults. It would be useful to influence a change in learning methods and approaches for adults with low educational achievements (greater individualisation, an appropriate choice of topics etc.).

d) All participants need to be provided with information and counselling for planning education and career development before, during and after completing the primary or secondary education programme (Vilič Klenovšek, 2023). For high-quality and successful achievement and counselling, an adult education consultant must be properly qualified, so appropriate further training programmes for consultants should be developed for more effective outreach and the inclusion of these groups of adults.

5 Conclusion

The problem of the educational failure of deaf and hard-of-hearing adults is not only an individual problem, but a complex social problem that requires a systematic and in-depth search for an effective solution strategy. Our research identified three categories of reasons for non-participation in adult education: negative experiences of previous schooling (difficulties in achieving educational goals and feeling unaccepted), low support from family and the wider environment, and objective reasons.

The problem of educational failure has been insufficiently studied. Needs and problems of adult deaf and hard-of-hearing are less known than those of younger generation so more studies of the same kind are needed.

Limitation of our study is the focus on participation in formal education programmes, especially primary and secondary education, although we are aware that higher levels of education are also important for the analysed population. We also mentioned the participation of the group in non-formal education and learning activities, as this has an extremely important social role as well as an educational one. Further study of the role of non-formal education and training for the deaf and hard-of-hearing population would be an important research challenge and can be a suggestion for further studies.

The research revealed lack of evidence on deaf and hard-of hearing adult population. The provision of statistical data would allow for more in-depth studies and insights into the education features of this population, which is clearly disadvantaged in terms of education.

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