University of Sarajevo
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MASTER'S THESIS in
English Language Teaching Methodology

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

(Podučavanje engleskog kao stranog jezika u osnovnim školama učenicima iz autističnog spektra)

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Sarajevo, 2023.

ABSTRACT

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) guarantees equal rights, independence, and active participation. Every child has the right to education in an environment accepting of diversity and an environment that provides equal opportunities for all. The main goal of the research was to explore if EFL teachers utilize different teaching methods and strategies when teaching children with autism. Furthermore, the goal was to compare EFL teaching to children with autism in two different contexts, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, and determine if teachers face the same complexities. The paper's purpose was to raise awareness of the problematic areas and conditions under which EFL teachers perform. The theoretical framework comprehensively analyzes inclusion and autism spectrum disorder, and it provides teaching methods and techniques considered to be most effective in teaching EFL to students with autism. Additionally, it deals with approaches and models of inclusion, individualization in teaching, and the necessity of parental involvement. It presents the current situation of EFL teaching to children with autism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. The research was designed as a qualitative study. Twelve (12) participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia took part in this study. They are all EFL teachers in primary schools. The results of the research portray a realistic situation of EFL teaching to children with autism, confirming the necessity of additional help needed in in order to make the process of inclusion blossom.

KEYWORDS: Autism spectrum disorder, Special educational needs, Inclusion, EFL, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia

APSTRAKT

Konvencija o pravima osoba sa invaliditetom (2006) garantuje jednaka prava, nezavisnost i aktivno učešće kako u poslovnom okruženju, tako i u obrazovnom sistemu. Svako dijete ima pravo na obrazovanje u okruženju koje prihvaća različitosti i pruža jednake mogućnosti za sve. Ovaj rad se strukturalno temelji na ispitivanju i problemu primjene različitih metoda i strategija kojima se služe nastavnici engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika pri podučavanju djece sa autizmom. Nadalje, cilj rada bio je uspostaviti komparativnu vezu u nastavi engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika djeci sa autizmom u dva različita konteksta: Bosni i Hercegovini i Srbiji, te utvrditi da li se nastavnici suočavaju sa istim izazovima. Svrha rada je podizanje svijesti o problematičnim područjima i uslovima u kojima rade nastavnici engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika. Teorijski okvir nastoji da sveobuhvatno analizira inkluziju i poremećaj iz spektra autizma, pa tako upućuje na nastavne metode i tehnike koje se smatraju najefikasnijim u podučavanju engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika djeci sa autizmom. Pored toga, bavi se pristupima i modelima inkluzije, individualizacijom u nastavi i neophodnošću uključivanja roditelja. Predstavlja jednu sinhronijsku perspektivu kada je riječ o podučavanju engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika djeci sa autizmom u Bosni i Hercegovini i Srbiji. Istraživanje je osmišljeno kao kvalitativna studija. U ovom istraživanju učestvovalo je dvanaest (12) učesnika iz Bosne i Hercegovine i Srbije. Svi učesnici su nastavnici engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika u osnovnim školama. Rezultati istraživanja oslikavaju realističnu situaciju podučavanja engleskog jezika kao stranog jezika djeci sa autizmom, potvrđujući potrebu za dodatnom pomoći koja je neophodna kako bi sam proces inkluzije bio unaprijeđen, ali i prepoznat kao jedan od najvećih prioriteta obrazovnog sistema.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: poremećaj iz spektra autizma, posebne obrazovne potrebe, inkluzija, engleski jezik kao strani jezik, Bosna i Hercegovina, Srbija

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of inclusion holds a powerful message of belonging and choice. While there are numerous interpretations of inclusion, its fundamental concept is to "give all students a choice to be educated alongside their peers, irrespective of their individual needs and abilities" (Delaney, 2016, p. 13). By adopting inclusive education, schools promote diversity and acceptance without prejudice based on a disability or any other difference that can make a child feel excluded.

The introduction to the concept of inclusion should begin with defining its term and significance. While many definitions of inclusion are available, it's crucial to understand which elements are essential for inclusion.

> Inclusion is a process that increases participation and reduces exclusion, whereas participation means greater recognition, acceptance, and respect, which, along with inclusion in the learning process and in social activities, ultimately fosters a sense of belonging in society. (Pantić, Closs & Ivošević, 2010, p. 23)

There are two models of disability: the social and the medical models. Houting (2019) explains how people mostly understand autism through the medical model, and they understand autism as a disability and a disorder. Houting (2019) further adds how the medical model perceives disability as an individual problem, while the social model assumes that disability happens only when the environment doesn't cater to individual characteristics. One explanation of the social model means the following:

> It is society and its institutions which are oppressive, discriminatory and disabling, and that attention therefore needs to be focused on the removal of obstacles to the participation of disabled people in the life of society, and in changing institutions, regulations and attitudes that create and maintain exclusion. (Campbell and Oliver, 1996 in Mittler, 2000, p. 3)

The medical model emphasizes the inabilities of a person, assuming that the autistic person is the one who fails to function appropriately due to a mental or a physical problem, and the problem can be "diagnosed, labeled, and treated, it is as if the student is 'faulty', and needs to be fixed" (Delaney, 2016, p. 13).

> The SEN (Special Educational Needs) concept is associated with placing everyone along a continuum, based on the assumption that there is no clear and categorical

distinction between the handicapped and the non-handicapped. (Norwich, 1996, p. 100)

Many documents which support children with SEN aid the ongoing fight against discrimination and marginalization of children. These documents point to the rights of children and people with SEN. They highlight the principles of inclusive education that bring awareness to the strengths of children with SEN instead of their weaknesses.

On 10 December 1948, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Article 26 of the declaration states that "everyone has the right to education" and that "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship" (United Nations, 1948, p.7).

Another important international human rights treaty adopted by the United Nations is the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. In Article 23, State Parties recognized that irrespective of the difficulty, whether physical or mental, a child is bound to enjoy a fulfilled life in conditions which "ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community" (United Nations, 1989, p.7).

Four years later, in December 1993, a document calling for equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. The *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* was one of the major outcomes of the Decade of Disabled Persons (United Nations, 1983–1992). Rule 6 of the documents states that education for all persons with disabilities should be an integral part of the educational system (United Nations, 1993).

Possibly, the most important milestone for inclusive education is the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* organized in June 1994 by the Government of Spain in cooperation with UNESCO.

Although the above-mentioned document and many others are supportive of the Education-for-All principle and that all children with SEN have the right to be taught in an inclusive environment, in practice, the much-needed reformation of the school system was overlooked. Children with SEN would follow the same curriculum without any

adjustments, and their individual needs were disregarded. As an outcome "inclusion is often seen simply as involving the movement of pupils from special to mainstream contexts, with the implication that they are 'included' once they are there" (Ainscow, 1999, p. 218).

1.1. Two contexts and inclusive education

The two republics of ex-Yugoslavia, namely Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, with the same primary education system for decades, became independent states in the 1990s. In both countries, primary education is compulsory, and children begin their primary education between 6 and 7 and a half. Primary education in Bosnia and Herzegovina lasts for nine years, while in Serbia, it lasts eight years. English language is a compulsory subject from the first grade and "as the age for English education lowers in classrooms across the globe, EFL teachers of young learners struggle to keep up with this trend and seek effective ways of teaching" (Shin, 2006, p. 2).

In the 2000s both countries started educational reform that involved the introduction of a more sophisticated system of inclusive education provision.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, as one of the developing countries, to keep up with European standards, had the educational reform in 2002. Children with SEN started to be included in mainstream classrooms. However, curriculums were not adapted to meet their needs or support them on their journey. Unfortunately, not enough research evidence can support the claim that the reform flourished. There were multiple reasons behind the hindered success of the educational reform described below:

> The recent history of the Western Balkans has been one of conflict, poverty, extreme uncertainty and loss of individual and civic trust, and a time when diversity, one of the region's human characteristics, potentially became a source of trouble and division rather than of human interest and enrichment. Many people in the region suffered acutely and the impact on their lives cannot really be fully grasped by those who are not of the region and who were not there but who are now ready, perhaps over-ready, with advice, criticism and help of various kinds, but also with recommendations and even commands. (Pantić, Closs and Ivošević, 2010, p. 5)

Successful implementation of inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina is challenging because schools cannot guarantee the requirements needed for the implementation. It is worth mentioning that a few schools show a good practice of inclusion. However, there is a long way ahead until their classrooms can serve as an inclusive education model.

Unfortunately, the burden will fall on students until teachers get the necessary support, training, and education.

Serbia like Bosnia and Herzegovina agreed to UNESCO's Education for All programme (UNESCO, 2002). Like its counterpart country, Serbia struggles to implement the necessary conditions that Education for All programme requires. Government of Republic of Serbia adopted the *Strategy for Improving the Position of Persons with Disabilities* in Serbia 2007–2015 on December 28, 2006. The law, as Maksimović (2017) defines, prohibits discrimination, and promotes social inclusion and equality of persons with disabilities. Another steppingstone for the improvement of inclusive education was the adoption of the new *Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System* in 2009. The law marks the formal beginning of inclusive education in Serbia and ensures "the conditions for the realization of the right of children with disabilities to education" (Maksimović, 2017, p. 35).

Many proponents of inclusion sometimes forget the burden put on teachers to carry out a class with inadequate knowledge, professional training, and permanent support in teaching inclusive classes. That being said, many teachers are committed and want to develop competencies to assist children with SEN.

With all obstacles threatening the success of inclusive education, the question remains if we will ever accommodate diverse classrooms and successfully respond to children's individual needs. Some stakeholders do not want to take accountability for the children with SEN thinking that it is not their duty to reform and make adjustments. How can disabled persons reach their full potential when not given any foundation to feel equal? Teachers can make a difference in their classrooms as agents of change and builders of confidence, and they can create a holistic environment for every child to reach their full potential and feel accepted.

1.2. Thesis outline

This paper deals with the primary English language classroom, EFL learners, teachers who teach children with autism, and overall special educational needs (SEN) present in both countries. The theoretical part consists of four main chapters. The first chapter details the background of inclusion and its progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. It examines approaches to education for English language learners with SEN and exemplary

models of inclusive education. It further distinguishes between equality and discrimination, two inseparable terms from inclusion.

Additionally, it defines individualization and its importance in bettering inclusive progress. It stresses the importance of collaboration and involvement of parents as a crucial step towards the successful implementation of inclusive education. The second title, ASD, gives a brief history of autism, its characteristics, diagnostic criteria, and how to assist a child with autism in a classroom. The third title, Teaching EFL (English as a Foreign Language) to Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, tackles the importance of effective teaching and the significance of knowing your young English learners. Finally, the paper presents Teaching Methods and EFL Teaching Strategies. In the Teaching Method part, Audiolingual, Audiovisual, and TPR methods are examined, while the final part revolves around successful strategies to teach all components of the English language.

The main goal of the research was to find the best strategies and teaching methods that have brought success in primary English language classrooms with autistic children in two educational contexts. To learn about the challenges and obstacles by examining if the EFL teachers had any additional help and support from the school, parents, or projects. The contexts are described, compared, and contrasted, providing conclusions that might point to a range of successful practices and teaching strategies. The idea behind the paper was to explore the micro-world of heterogeneous classrooms.

The opportunity to participate in two ERASMUS+ exchanges notably impacted my perspective on this topic. Unfortunately, learning about inclusion and SEN in Spain couldn't be fully realized due to the pandemic. However, I had access to materials and read a lot on the topic of inclusion and its progression in Spain. In contrast, my experience in Serbia surpassed my expectations, as I was given the opportunity to work with two professionals in the field of inclusion, Professor Vera Savić and Jelena Starčević. They provided me with valuable insights and knowledge about inclusion, autism, and its current developments in Serbia. Nevertheless, I always found inspiration in my older brother, who attended a special school. That experience allowed me to be surrounded by children with SEN, and I made it my mission to support them in any way possible.

The succeeding chapters provide a methodological framework that consists of a questionnaire and an interview. The research was designed as qualitative research because, in the questionnaires, the respondents were asked open-ended questions. A total of 12

teachers participated in the research, six from Bosnia and Herzegovina and six from Serbia. In addition, eight teachers participated in the interview, while four completed the questionnaire. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, interviews and questionnaires were conducted online.

The research results show that without additional help and guidance, teachers do not feel confident in teaching EFL to children with autism. Furthermore, the results indicate that parental involvement is essential in providing the help children with ASD need. The research confirmed that external factors and funding are necessary to better inclusive education. Professionals who are experienced in working with children with SEN, particularly ASD, are lacking in schools. Assistive technology is needed with improved curriculums catered to the needs of children with autism, fewer children in one class, more time dedicated to children with autism, and so much more detailed in the methodological part. Finally, the research shows that teachers possess the willingness. Still, eminent help is needed to make inclusion further develop and to have classrooms equipped with competent and confident teachers ready to assist children with SEN. However, it is essential to acknowledge that teachers must be aware that certain aspects of teaching heavily depend on their involvement, and they must be up to par with recent findings, methods, techniques, and approaches concerning teaching children with autism. With collective collaboration, educators, parents, professionals, the Ministry of Education, and special schools should all make efforts to create a brighter future for our children with SEN.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will focus extensively on teaching EFL in primary education for children with special educational needs (SEN). We will examine various approaches to teaching EFL to children with SEN, including strategies that prioritize inclusivity and diversity. We will also explore successful models of inclusive EFL primary education and consider the role of equality, individualization, and parent involvement in the education of children with SEN. By delving deeply into these topics, we hope to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities that arise when teaching EFL to children with SEN and to highlight best practices for promoting inclusion and success in the classroom.

2.1. INCLUSION

As already established, inclusion has many definitions, but the name itself calls for acceptance, change, reform, equality, and justice. The main challenge is understanding inclusion because it requires effort, willingness to change, and empathy. To increase our understanding, we have to listen to other people and their needs instead of believing that we are the epitome of current values and ideas. Our society is diverse, and diversity can lead to labeling, marginalization, exclusion, or stereotyping because "it is far easier to judge others by measuring them against our own egocentric self-image than it is to accept that those whom we perceive as different from ourselves are of equal worth" (Rose, 2010, p. 20).

Recognition of exclusion and injustice done to children with SEN led to momentum in education. Rose (2010) noted how the encouraged teachers, educators, researchers, and proponents of inclusion started challenging the status quo and are searching for ways of changing the lives of communities for the better. However, changes in education alone cannot resolve fundamental issues in the lives of disempowered children, but it is a necessary step for change. All individuals within education systems are crucial for fulfilling the fundamental right to education for all. The fact that inclusion has been an important topic for a prolonged time only brings awareness to the issue's complexity and the inability to find the correct way to implement it.

Moreover, alongside inclusion, Flem and Keller (2000) talk about other two inseparable terms, mainstreaming and integration, explaining how many try to draw a visible line between these terms indicating that they are not the same and that in practice they function differently. Mainstreaming is defined as the "carefully planned and monitored placement of students in general education classrooms for their academic and social educational programs" (Salend, 1998, p. 6).

Integration and inclusion are often perceived as synonymous, which is not the case. The process of integration, although still aimed to help children, doesn't mean reformation. It simply integrates all children in regular classrooms without tailoring the curriculum to suit their needs and abilities. Finally, the term inclusive education stands for "an educational system that includes a large diversity of pupils and which differentiates education for this diversity" (Meijer et al., 1997a, p. 1).

2.1.1. Approaches to EFL primary education for children with SEN

Before introducing approaches to education for children with SEN, it is important to know the most frequent special educational needs teachers encounter in their classrooms. Lowe (2016) lists a few needs, such as dysgraphia, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, ADHD, ADD, auditory processing disorder, autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome, Tourette's syndrome, visual and hearing impairments. Learning difficulties differ and they can be neurological, cognitive, or socio emotional (Viskari, 2005, p. 6).

When it comes to approaches to education for children with SEN, we may recognize three approaches. Meijer, Soriano, and Watkins (2003) note that due to frequent policy changes it is difficult to make a clear distinction when categorizing. The first category is the *one-track* approach which implies the inclusion of almost all children into mainstream education. Countries that practice this approach are Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, and Cyprus. The second category- the *multi-track* approach - has a different approach to inclusion, as it alternates between mainstream schools and special schools.

> They offer a variety of services between the two systems (i.e., mainstream and special needs education systems). Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia belong to this category. (Meijer, Soriano and Watkins, 2003, p. 7)

The third category is the *two-track* approach. The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) explained that this type of approach requires children with SEN to attend special schools or special classes. Countries like Switzerland and Belgium somewhat practice this approach to SEN education. However, in Switzerland, they offer children with SEN who attend mainstream schools to have special services found in special schools.

2.1.2. Good models of inclusive EFL primary education

According to Shin "it is widely believed that starting the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) before the critical period—12 or 13 years old—will build more proficient speakers of English" (Shin, 2006, p.2).

It is important to shed light on several countries that, with their consistent efforts, show a good practice of inclusion and ensure a good-quality education for all. For example, the

United Kingdom places children with SEN "along a continuum, based on the premise that there should be no categorical distinction between the handicapped and the non-handicapped" (Krol-Gierat, 2020, p. 23). Additionally, Finland's firm belief in equality in education serves as another great model of inclusive education. Finland started including children with moderate intellectual disabilities in the mid-1980s. Finland's latest statistics show how "around 30% of compulsory school students (K-9) receive some form of additional support, which is undoubtedly a kind of unofficial world record" (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011, p. 277). One of the most admirable comforts that Finland's educational system provides for children is that "a child doesn't need to 'wait to fail' to get additional support and thus the nature of this service is at least partly preventive" (Graham, Jahnukainen, 2011, p. 278). Despite its good practice of inclusion, even Finland has been heavily criticized for its educational policies. However, constant high achievements by Finnish students proved otherwise.

2.1.3. Equality and discrimination in primary EFL classroom

It is a general belief that schools aspire to secure equal opportunities for all children and their written policies, as Farrell (2004) puts it, often reference 'equality', 'discrimination', and statements approving of equal opportunities for all pupils. However, a great injustice is done to all children who may not always receive equal opportunities.

Often marginalized groups include "girls and boys, pupils from different ethnic minority backgrounds and asylum seekers, as well as pupils with SEN" (Farrell, 2004, p. 28). Roma children in particular have been perceived as the most hated minority in Europe. "Roma are often regarded in (Central and Eastern European) countries as pariahs or even a sub-human species" (Guy, 2001, p. 4). Gifted children cannot be left out because, very often, they don't get the support they need in a classroom. Teachers frequently overlook the fact that gifted students have different struggles. To help them meet their needs and reach their full learning potential, teachers need to support them to help them in their learning process by offering adequate support. Undoubtedly, learning potentials will differ from child to child, further emphasizing the need to recognize and adapt a varied approach to learning goals for each child.

Despite the introduction of the National Disability Discrimination Act in 1992, according to OECD (2012) people with disabilities are considerably less educated than their

non-disabled peers. Before dismantling discrimination as a negative concept, it is important to make a distinction between positive and negative discrimination.

> This relates to the issue that, educationally, pupils with SEN are likely to require preferential treatment to move nearer to a position in which they can more readily benefit from the opportunities of which other children can more easily take advantage. (Farrell, 2004, p. 3)

It is vital to respond to diversity and cater to all individual needs that teachers may encounter in their classrooms. This means that teachers must keep up with different and contemporary strategies to assist their students.

2.1.4. Individualization in primary EFL classroom

Individualization and humanistic teaching are two intertwined terms that complement each other. "One of the most comprehensive approaches to respecting diversity in education is offered by humanistic teaching educational philosophy" (Savić, 2009, p. 12). The homogenized educational model fails to recognize the individual differences among students, and it portrays diversity as an obstacle, significantly hindering the promotion of equitable classroom. Being aware that all learners are different, and that one size does not fit all is a great way to start responding to diversity and creating equal opportunities for all pupils.

> All students have individual learning preferences, backgrounds, and needs. Today, educational research enables us to better identify those variables that can affect a student's performance in school. Once you are aware of the differences that can exist, you are better able to differentiate your instructions to reach as many students as possible. (Heacox, 2002, p. 7)

Norwich (1996) distinguishes between three types of educational needs: individual needs, pedagogical needs, and common needs.

> Individual needs can arise from characteristics and goals which are unique to an individual and are different from all other children. Secondly, common needs arise from characteristics which are common to all children, such as the emotional need to belong and to feel related. Thirdly, exceptional needs, which arise from

characteristics, shared by some others, such as, an emotional difficulty, a visual impairment or high musical abilities. (Norwich, 1996, p. 103)

Individualization requires the removal of physical and communication barriers. There are many forms of individualization, such as space adaptation and working conditions. This entails making sure that schools have a wheelchair ramp or an elevator, constant furniture arrangements for the visually impaired, tactile boards, etc., anything that can help students with disabilities keep pace with their peers. The second form of individualization would be adjusting teaching resources and materials to be accessible to all students. Thanks to technological advances and continuous research aimed at improving the lifestyle of disabled people, we have numerous assistive technology tools that can have a strong impact on students with developmental disabilities. Those assistive tools aid their independence and autonomy, boost their confidence, and improve their quality of life and social interaction. (Katalog asistivne tehnologije, 2017). For example, visually impaired pupils would greatly benefit from Braille, audiotape, enlarged print, or mechanical Braille typewriters such as Perkins or Tetrapoint. For students with motor skill disorders, there are alternative mouses like Track Ball computer mouse, voice recognition software for students with speech impediments, and reading software for students that struggle with dyslexia, etc. (Katalog asistivne tehnologije, 2017). Adjustment of methods and techniques is another form of individualization, and it is important to distinguish between sensory modes-sight, hearing, and touch. Most commonly, we encounter three types of learners.

> *Visual* learners process information most effectively when they can see what they're learning- for example, through reading, writing, and observing. *Auditory* learners need to hear information to help them learn-for example, through oral presentations and explanations. *Kinesthetic* or *tactile* learners learn best when they can manipulate objects or materials-for example, by doing, touching and moving. (Heacox, 2002, p. 8)

Finally, test adjustment and evaluation should be individualized because teachers need to make sure that pupils have alternatives that allow them to work in the way that suits them best and that promotes equal opportunities. Furthermore, it is essential to find good ways of grading students with learning disabilities because their knowledge should never be compromised by their disability which usually happens when they are examined in inadequate ways. Individualization is only possible once teachers get to know their students

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and their interests, learn about their multiple intelligences, and discover what they know and don't know. When teachers realize their learners' strengths and limitations, only then can individualization take place and be beneficial for students.

2.1.5. Parents as partners in inclusive education

It goes without saying that children have the best results when their parents are interested and included in their educational process. Above all, parents decide which school their children will attend, and, as Mijatović (2013) points out, they have the right to be informed of all the opportunities offered to their children in the education system. The student's achievements are heavily affected by the overall relationship between school and parents. Parents must be informed and engaged in their children's education. Hannell (2007) emphasizes how teachers find that collaborating with parents requires effort, skill, tact, time, and patience; however, she notes that "it is all too easy to misjudge parents on the basis of preconceived ideas, prejudices or limited understanding" (Hanell, 2007, p. 118). Parents act as a necessary piece of the puzzle for effective inclusive education and intervention.

> Parents are the real experts with their own child. Not only do they know the pupil better than anyone else, they also care more than anyone else. Their influence on the pupil is likely to be much stronger than the teachers' and their involvement will be lifelong. On the other hand, teachers have professional expertise and experience. It is obvious that a partnership between these two expert groups is going to be part of the future. (Hannell, 2007, p. 118)

Teachers have to empathize with parents and go beyond the traditional relationship between teachers and parents. When engaging with parents and their children, teachers have to consider various elements such as the family's cultural background, religion, education, etc. Parents have to understand and be informed of the steps teachers take to help their children, their opinions should never be undermined, and teachers have to take accountability for children's progress. Furthermore, it is important to use simple language to ensure the message is spread without any complexity or confusion. Teachers and parents have to work together in a child's best interest because, with combined efforts and cooperation, full potential can be achieved.

2.1.6. Inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

After the medical model of disability was replaced by the social model, a new philosophy around teaching children with SEN evolved. Ideas of appropriation and adjustment permeated educational systems all around the world. This meant that schools started to change to accommodate students' needs regardless of their disability. "This philosophical approach led to a positive legislation regarding inclusion in many countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina" (Memišević & Hodžić, 2011, p. 699). Despite supporting a positive legislature, Bosnia and Herzegovina still faces many inclusive education obstacles. Namely, the unfortunate war that took place from 1992 until 1995, besides causing immense damage, left the country with a complex political structure.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a dual system of education, general and special education. In 2004, the *Framework Law on Preschool Care and Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina* was passed, further supporting the right for children with SEN to attend mainstream schools with adjusted curriculums that will meet their needs (Article 12). The decision is left to parents to decide if their children should enroll in a general or special school. On the surface level, this may seem encouraging because the law is supporting parents in their choice. Still, the burden of categorization that parents and children have to go through makes this already complex process even more stressful. To access designated Centers for special education and rehabilitation, children have to get an official document (record of categorization) proving their disability. "The record of categorization is a document issued by a multi-disciplinary commission confirming that a child has some kind of a disability" (Bišćevic, Zečić, Mujkanović, Mujkanović & Memiševic, 2017, p. 65).

> Although there is a multidisciplinary team consisting of psychologist, psychiatrist, occupational therapist, and speech therapist involved in the categorisation of the children, the final decision is usually made based on a child's IQ score as measured by the standardised Revision of Wechsler's intelligence scales for children (50–70 mild intellectual disability; 35–50 moderate intellectual disability; 20–35 severe intellectual disability and less than 20 profound intellectual disability). There is no much consideration of the child's adaptive potential in the categorisation of the children. (Memišević & Hodžić, 2011, p. 701)

Parents are left in a dilemma about where to enroll their children and from which school their children can benefit the most. Some parents opt to enroll their children in special

schools in hopes that their children will receive the best support there since the curriculum includes "therapies and special techniques for children with sensory impairments (sight and hearing), cognitive and physical impairments, and speech or language impairments" (Johnstone, Lazarus, Lazetić & Nikolić, 2018, p. 5). Parents are also afraid that their children might get bullied if they enroll in regular schools, and out of that fear, they turn to special education, which can sometimes be dangerous because of the possibility of limiting a child's potential. On the other hand, some parents prefer their children to go to regular school to avoid being left out, believing that our educational system has grown and can support their children.

A study in Serbia explored parents' perspectives on special and regular education at a kindergarten level. Parents divided their children into developmental (special education) and educational (mainstream education) groups. The results presented how parents in the developmental group emphasized the need for experts in their children's development, while those in the educational group valued social and cognitive opportunities due to being in a group without difficulties. (Starčević, Dimitrijević & Milenković, 2020).

Although the attitudes towards inclusive education are positive at all administrative levels, there is a concern that Bosnia and Herzegovina is not ready for the demands and the support that inclusive education yearns for. Study of Quantitative and Qualitative Monitoring of Inclusive Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrated devastating issues that pose a threat to inclusive education and that prevent the successful implementation of inclusion into the educational system of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

> Poorly concretized and insufficiently supported realization of inclusive education through legal documents; poorly defined and inadequately used terminology; architectural barriers; number of students in inclusive classrooms; lack of equipment and didactic teaching tools; poorly prepared and trained teachers for teaching in inclusive classrooms; lack of cooperation with health education and social sector; poor level of cooperation between preschool institutions, elementary schools and high schools; negative and neutral attitudes of subjects of pedagogical praxis and of wider social community towards inclusive education; insufficient level of cooperation between families and school, and lack of professional teams and professional support. (Kafedžić, 2009; Kvalitativni i kvantitativni monitoring

inkluzije u osnovnim školama u Bosni i Hercegovini, 2009 as cited in Kafedžić, 2015, p. 12)

While Bosnia and Herzegovina is making great efforts to make education for all possible, other difficulties have come to the surface. Teaching English as a foreign language has raised many questions and issues and developed a certain stigma around teaching a foreign language to students with SEN. It has become the accepted belief that students with SEN will struggle with English language learning, and their eligibility to even learn EFL has been questioned. Despite the lack of empirical evidence suggesting that students with SEN are incapable of acquiring a foreign language, many still choose to perceive children with SEN as inadequate for EFL learning. However, studies have found that language educators believe that "there is a mystique about teaching learners with special needs, and that they would be better taught by those who are familiar with this 'special' way of teaching" (McColl, 2005 in Wight, 2015, p. 47). Thus, inclusion is of great importance for children with SEN to acquire EFL with fewer difficulties and appropriate teaching methods and strategies.

With all the above-mentioned, it is difficult to predict when inclusive education will flourish in Bosnia and Herzegovina or if it ever will. Slowly, the country started recognizing the need for additional support to help children with SEN, and it passed a law in 2011 allowing children with disabilities to have teaching assistants. However, since teacher assistants had to undergo the necessary education and training, it took years for the first teaching assistants to be employed. What is even more unfortunate is that even today, young teachers are left with inadequate knowledge after completing their studies. Additional support by school management is crucial, and cooperation between special and mainstream schools creates individualized curriculums. Once this is achieved, the country can expect inclusive education to bloom.

2.1.7. Teaching EFL in inclusive classrooms in Bosnia and Herzegovina

A common problem in both countries is insufficient education and preparation of EFL teachers to engage in inclusive classrooms. Although inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina was implemented in 2004, English teachers still face the same difficulties in their classrooms. According to Bešić (2016), learning difficulties that occur in second language acquisition go unnoticed and without proper intervention. Bešić (2016) mentions that reading is the most problematic area of second language acquisition. Dyslexia, ADHD

(Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), Dysgraphia, and Dyscalculia are common, and unfortunately, many times, students who struggle with them are wrongly generalized as lazy or bad. However, it is crucial to note that English teachers are not obliged to diagnose these difficulties. Instead, if recognized, they should consult with experts for help.

> Also, one more misunderstanding about teachers' education is that the teacher should know how to create the curriculum and lesson plan right after the difficulty is stated. Every child with LD is different and it has its own characteristics, which might correlate with other children and difficulties, but only the experts can characterize and make assumptions and solutions towards someone's difficulty and way of supporting it. Teachers should be aware of the difficulties, be educated enough to use different teaching styles, strategies, and methods, and be considerate and understand different needs of every child. (Bešić, 2016, p. 75)

Insufficient funding from institutions like ministries is a big obstacle for inclusive EFL classrooms. Bosnia and Herzegovina lacks investment in teacher education programs, technology, seminars, online courses, etc. Bešić (2016) talks about an interesting project for teachers in Una-Sana canton, funded by the American Embassy, called Face the Difficulties and Study with Me. The project offers teachers to learn about SEN, and the project offers teachers to meet, work, discuss, and exchange materials with other teachers who may face the same difficulties. The project encourages the MOOC style of learning (Massive Open Online Course), and teachers are welcome to participate in online workshops. What Bešić (2016) recommends for English and their professional development is to have educational workshops in their schools. "Teachers are obligated to write a research paper every school year and have a presentation in their school and in their own way and pace, they could research and get information on the topics they are interested in" (Bešić, 2016, p. 78). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are eight public universities. The University of Sarajevo implemented the Bologna principle in 2005, which marked a significant change in the Department of English Language and Literature. Namely, after finishing their bachelor's studies, students opting to continue with their master's studies can choose among four programs: teaching, linguistics, literature, and translation (Odsjek za Anglistiku, 2018). Although the Bologna Process brought many positive changes, there is still an urgent need for more courses on inclusive education, better teacher training, and more devotion to children with SEN.

Furthermore, at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, the subject of Language Acquisition encompasses a range of topics that are explored in-depth. These topics include the Issues of Inclusive Education in Sarajevo Canton with a focus on English Language Acquisition, the Acquisition of a Second/Foreign Language in Children with Autism, and the Acquisition of English Language in Children with Developmental Disorders such as Mental Retardation, Autism, and Cerebral Palsy. Additionally, methodological subjects delve into critical areas such as the Attitudes, Experiences, and Competencies of English Language Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms and Methods and Techniques in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Students with Special Educational Needs. Through the comprehensive exploration of these topics, the Faculty of Philosophy aims to advance knowledge and understanding in language acquisition and promote effective practices in inclusive education.

Additionally, Žero (2022) explores the intricate situation of post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina and highlights its potential to serve as a pathway to an inclusive society. The author stresses the importance of conducting further research on both pre-service and in-service teacher competencies. Additionally, advocating for a bottom-up approach, Žero (2022) emphasizes its necessity as a crucial step towards achieving systemic transformation.

Even without formal education in support of teaching English to students with SEN, EFL teachers are doing their best to assist their students. A study conducted by Bešić (2016) shows that of 30 EFL teachers, 80% revealed that they have individual lesson plans for children with SEN. Despite all obstacles, it is admirable to see how teachers give their best to help their students and make necessary adjustments. The study indicates that more awareness should be raised in schools about disabilities, stressing the importance of collaboration with parents. Teachers should do their best to support children with SEN. Even without funding or a better teacher education program, teachers can work on themselves and develop professionally. With the unfortunate COVID 19 situation, many online workshops and courses arose on the topic of inclusion and autism. Many platforms are expanding quickly to keep pace with recent changes which struck the world. This offers many new opportunities for teachers to learn, engage and grow. "Providing teachers with the training and tools necessary to foster positive attitudes about inclusion is a key step to ensuring the success of inclusion" (Walker, 2012, p. 31).

2.1.8. Inclusive education in Serbia

The year 2001 was a turning point for the implementation of the reforms within the educational system in Serbia (Cvjetićanin & Segedinac, 2011). After the adoption of the *Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System* in 2009, visible changes in educational policy appeared (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 72/09, 52/11, 55/13, 35/15). According to Maksimović (2017), the law enabled the conditions for exercising the right to equal education in mainstream schools. Maksimović (2017) further emphasizes that the new law brought a fair enrollment policy, increasing access to education for all, and prohibition of discrimination, thus contributing to the reformation of the educational system. The law included measures referring to "the achievement of standards, development of individual education plan and provision of additional support, school enrolment, running the final exam and appointment of pedagogue assistants" (Spasenović, Maksić, 2013, p. 210). Serbia like Bosnia and Herzegovina has regular and special schools, children with moderate to severe disabilities usually attend special schools. According to Johnstone, Lazarus, Lazetić & Nikolić (2018), about 1.5% of children attend special schools. However, special schools are also attended by disadvantaged children such as Roma children, mainly for the "adjusted and adapted curricula, the reduced stigma and teasing of students, and freely available meals at special schools" (Johnstone, Lazarus, Lazetić & Nikolić, 2018, p. 5). Although the percentage of Roma children enrolled in special schools is decreasing, the overrepresentation of Roma children in special schools is still a long-lasting issue in terms of quality and equality of education (European Roma Right Centre, 2014). This poses a problem because special schools should be attended by pupils only when it is in the child's best interest. In contrast, in the case of Roma children, parents would prefer to enroll them in mainstream schools, but out of fear of discrimination and humiliation, their children end up in special schools. For the same reason, parents of disabled children fear enrolling their children in mainstream schools because the most common factors contributing to bullying in regular classrooms are Romani ethnicity, disabilities or low grades, and poverty (European Roma Right Centre, 2014).

> According to a survey by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development (MESTD) that was conducted in 80% of all primary and secondary schools in Serbia, 92.2% of all pupils in need of additional support attend mainstream schools (others attend special schools). (Johnstone, Lazarus, Lazetić & Nikolić, 2018, p. 4).

One of the most recent documents in the field of education in Serbia is the *Strategy of the Development of Education in Serbia 2020* (SED 2020) (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No.72/12).

> This strategy document sets the priorities and objectives for development of children with disabilities in inclusive settings by: (1) focusing on increased enrolment of children with disabilities in regular schools; (2) calling for professional development for teachers, school leaders, and therapists on inclusive strategies; (3) increasing efficiency of educational delivery through enhanced service delivery in regular schools; and (4) aligning curriculum to local needs. (Nikolić, Cvijetić, Branković, Đorđić & Johnstone, 2019, p. 2)

Obviously, there are legal grounds for the development of inclusive education. Still, as Maksimović (2017) concludes, the inclusion of children with SEN into regular classrooms requires removing obstacles in every educational system that cannot be legally foreseen and defined.

Moreover, with attempts to make inclusive education possible, just like in Bosnia and Herzegovina, teaching EFL presents a significant challenge in Serbia. It is widely believed and accepted that "students who struggle with the acquisition of their native language will necessarily experience difficulties mastering foreign language" (Skinner & Smith, 2011, p.1). However, Skinner and Smith (2011) further emphasize the following:

> Although exemptions and alternatives are needed by some students with severe language difficulties, the literature is increasingly indicating that many of these students can successfully complete foreign language curricula. This is especially true when accommodations and specialized teaching methodologies are implemented in sections of foreign language courses designed specifically to meet the needs of students with learning difficulties. (Skinner & Smith, 2011, p.1)

Students with SEN will probably struggle with EFL acquisition more than their non-disabled peers. However, it is important to shed light on the positive aspects of EFL learning. Kleinert, Cloyd, Rego, and Gibson (2007) give several reasons to highlight the importance of foreign language learning for students with SEN. Firstly, learning a foreign language can hone a better understanding of their native language. Additionally, foreign language learning fosters sensitivity and tolerance towards other cultures and cultural

differences. Furthermore, students gain confidence and motivation when mastering challenging materials that their peers without SEN use. Finally, the intensive nature of foreign language learning increases the chances for success for students with SEN as they can partake in other challenging subjects.

Just like its counterpart country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia struggles with almost identical obstacles preventing the successful implementation of inclusive education and the successful EFL teaching to students with SEN. Teachers are in dire need of support, professional training, and proper education. Teachers lack the necessary competencies to assist children in large mixed-ability classrooms. Large classes pose a great challenge, and teachers lack the expertise to help children with SEN because they have inadequate knowledge of how to do it. They lack adequate teacher training, which is crucial for diverse classrooms.

2.1.9. Teaching EFL in inclusive classrooms in Serbia

Although we have pointed out that inclusive education in both settings is still in process with many challenges and obstacles, for the sake of this research, we will try and portray the challenges that teachers face in EFL classrooms.

The main challenge that teachers face in their classrooms is diversity. Classrooms consist of learners with different abilities, learning styles, preferences, learning speeds, etc. Savić (2009) emphasizes how for a successful response to diversity, teachers need to create an inclusive environment where children are welcomed and allowed to participate and reach their maximum potential. Savić (2009) further warns that children with SEN pose the biggest challenge to EFL teachers in Serbia.

A study conducted by Savić in 2009 involving fifty-six teachers of English teaching in primary schools in Serbia gave us an insight into beliefs related to inclusion, teacher training, and the understanding of inclusive education. The study showed 71% of teachers had a narrow experience of inclusive education and how to assist a child with SEN. Respondents who did not support inclusion stressed poor training of English language teachers and general inability to respond to the needs of children with SEN.

> They are unaware of these children's potentials or preserved abilities, but rather stress that children with SEN "need more attention", "need special treatment and attention", " have problems to follow the lesson, they are not able to interact with

other children, they are not accepted by other students", "cannot achieve much in regular classes, which can be frustrating for them" as reason against placing them in regular classes, or point out that "teachers are not trained enough to handle such children appropriately". (Savić, 2009, p. 21)

However, teachers who had a positive attitude toward the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream classrooms could see that inclusion would be beneficial not only for children with SEN but for their peers as well.

"The other students would more easily accept such children and learn to be cooperative", "they might make better progress", "it can help them in many ways", "they need to have the same rights in our school system". They empathize with children with SEN and focus on their needs, understanding that children with SEN benefit not only linguistically, but emotionally and socially in inclusive educational settings. (Savić, 2009, p. 21)

The study emphasized the importance of teachers who serve as pillars of a successful inclusive setting, stressing that their positive attitudes are crucial for the inclusion process. Sometimes what can hinder a positive attitude is insufficient knowledge. In this study, most respondents didn't have a vast knowledge of special educational needs. "The situation is rather alarming and proves that teachers of English in Serbia are not at all formally prepared to teach in inclusive settings, nor able to detect impairments and disorders when they meet them" (Savić, 2009, p. 23). Teachers did little to adapt their syllabus to meet their students' needs. Only six teachers cooperated with school specialists and created Individual Education Plan for children with SEN. Most teachers said that an individual and differentiated approach takes a lot of time, and since their classes are too big, they can't dedicate themselves to individuals.

We can conclude from the study conducted a decade ago that teachers needed extra training to perform better in inclusive settings. Unfortunately, this hasn't changed. EFL teachers in Serbia still don't receive this type of support and education, and it seems that the situation with inclusive education didn't change much. Many teachers agree that seminars organized by the Ministry of Education of Serbia and school authorities would be of great help. Additional training provided by experts who work with children with SEN would contribute to developing teachers' knowledge and general preparedness for teaching

in an inclusive setting. Overall, even without professional support, teachers with a more positive attitude, willingness to experiment, and explore offered literature on inclusion and EFL, can make their classrooms slightly better and create a more encouraging environment. According to Brumen, Bračko, and Krajnc (2014) collaborative team teaching, consultation hours, and language portfolios are underutilized. All three strategies are effective, but most teachers don't practice them due to lack of time, poor organization, or unfamiliarity. Therefore, raising more awareness of alternative teaching, utilization of portfolios, peer teaching, use of technology, and being more open to try and experiment with different methods and strategies can help teachers develop their approach to teaching students with SEN and hopefully bring more progress towards inclusive practice and EFL teaching.

To conclude, teachers generally have positive attitudes toward children with SEN, but "despite their motivation to responsibly implement inclusive education, they also mention a large number of difficulties faced in school practice" (Popović, Nikolić, Divac, 2020, p. 487). These difficulties draw attention to the urgency of limiting the number of children in classes, fostering a collaborative relationship between teachers and parents, and the necessity of pedagogical and personal assistants. All these difficulties are of systematic nature, and teachers need to collaborate, share knowledge of successful methods of teaching to assist their students (Popović, Nikolić, Divac, 2020). Additionally, cooperation between special and regular schools is imperative to improve and accelerate the current progress towards achieving successful implementation of inclusive education.

3. AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

"Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are lifelong conditions severely impairing social skills and autonomy" (Posar, Resca and Visconti, 2015, p. 146). The term autism stems from Greek words *autos* (self) and *ismos* (condition) used to describe schizophrenic patients who appeared to "turn inward on one's self" (Kuparinen, 2017, p. 6). Additionally, Elberson (2010) notes that the word *autism* was used by psychiatrists to describe the self-contained quality of people with ASD.

The definition of ASD has historically changed. At first, it was defined as a serious emotional disturbance. One of the hypotheses implied that ASD is related to genetic *growth dysregulation,* which means that the head of a child with ASD initially starts smaller, but

over a short time, it grows dramatically faster compared to other normally developed individuals, and this rapid growth leads to abnormalities, and it compromises neural cells.

The Theory of Mind hypothesis, whose precursors studied it in chimpanzees, implies that "individuals with ASD fail to construe the mental states of others because of a deficit in the mirror-neuron system" (Sousa, 2007, p. 85). This hypothesis was refuted because Baron-Cohen, Leslie, and Frith (1985) conducted an experiment popularly known as the Sally-Anne test of false belief. They examined 20 children diagnosed with autism and compared their behavior to children diagnosed with Down Syndrome and clinically healthy children. The results "strongly support the hypothesis that autistic children as a group fail to employ a theory of mind" (Baron-Cohen, Leslie, and Frith, 1985, p. 43). These and many other hypotheses led to the current-day perception of autism.

> Autism is a behaviorally defined disorder, characterised by qualitative impairments in social communication, social interaction, and social imagination, with a restricted range of interests and often stereotyped repetitive behaviours and mannerisms. Sensory hyposensitivities or hypersensitivities to the environment are common features. (Baird, Cass, & Slonims, 2003, p. 488)

Autism is perceived as a fascinating and puzzling condition, and the perception of ASD has changed over the years. The two most prominent people who have contributed to today's understanding of Autism were Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger. However, ASD had a long unfortunate history.

> Kanner (1964) quotes Martin Luther's reported account of a child whose behavior suggests that he might have been severely autistic (though Kanner did not mention this possibility). Luther recommended that the child be taken to the nearby river and drowned, because he was possessed of the Devil and had no soul. (Wing, 1997, p.14)

Henry Maudsley (1867) proposed an explanation for unusual behavior in children diagnosing how they suffer from childhood psychosis. Despite being initially shocking, it became a widely accepted opinion. Later. Leo Kanner (1949) suggested that the "children's condition was also due to being reared by cold, detached, humorless, rigid parents who were perfectionists, caring for their children like attendants caring for a machine" (Wing, 1997, p.14). Consequently, parents were shattered by this notion, especially after many

medical professionals and psychiatrists accepted the theory. According to Wing (1997), Kanner perceived autism and schizophrenia as separate but abandoned that under the influence of colleagues.

As a result, and a reaction of many parents rejecting the notion that their children's condition was their fault, parents' associations emerged. As a result, parental efforts and influence revolutionary changed and shaped ideas on autism. "The power of parent organisations and the destigmatisation of disabilities, at least in childhood, have greatly improved the services for autistic people of all ages" (Wolff, 2004, p.206).

3.1. Characteristics of ASD

Although there are some common characteristics of ASDs, they significantly differ and vary in their symptoms. The very word "spectrum" implies that the challenges range from mild to severe. The umbrella term ASD is used to "exemplify the scope, diversity, and degree of disability that exists within autism" (Kuparinen, 2017, p. 7).

Furthermore, ASD cannot be generalized, nor can it be assumed that people with autism have the same universal conditions which apply to every person with ASD. However, the "inability" of people with autism to socialize most conveniently has been continually affirmed, and Kanner described this observation as "extreme aloneness". The preference of children with ASD to be alone and to do things separately has been noted in many studies. Notably, one study conducted in Poland in an elementary school included two students diagnosed with disorders on the autism spectrum. The conclusion from the study showed that the two boys preferred to work independently instead of in groups. Delaney (2016) further agrees, stating how working collaboratively is not always the best option for students with ASD to learn.

Kanner emphasized children's avoidance of noisy objects. "Yet it is not the noise or motion itself that is dreaded. The disturbance comes from the noise or motion that intrudes itself, or threatens to intrude itself, upon the child's aloneness" (Kanner, 1943, p. 245). Furthermore, he noted that the children with ASD had speech disturbances. Blacher and Christensen (2011) described that verbal children's speech was often delayed and peculiar with echolalic repetition of phrases and repetition of pronouns. Kanner observed children's obsessiveness toward sameness, repetition of actions, and their remarkable rote memory. Sousa (2007) states that about 10% of individuals with ASD show savant skills, they excel

in art, math, music, and reading, and they are able to memorize an enormous amount of information.

3.2. Severity specifiers for ASD

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a versatile and complex phenomenon that can further be classified as high-functioning and low-functioning autism.

As the words imply, "people with high-functioning autism may possess eccentric abilities such as extraordinary memory, but whose conduct in social situations can be somewhat strange or challenged" (Kuparinen, 2017, p. 5). On the contrary, people at the low-functioning end of the spectrum may suffer from many ASD conditions such as limited intellectual properties, inability to communicate, etc.

Previous diagnostic subcategories proposed by DSM-IV-Text Revision have been abolished by the fifth edition of the diagnostical and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-5). More importantly DSM-5 has introduced significant changes.

> In the diagnostic criteria, language abilities not employed in social communication have been de-emphasized. Further, the diagnostic subcategories, that is, autistic disorder, Asperger disorder, Rett disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, and pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) not otherwise specified, have been abolished. DSM-5 describes three levels of increasing severity of ASD, from (1) ("requiring support") to (2) ("requiring substantial support"), finally to (3) ("requiring very substantial support"). (Posar, Resca and Visconti, 2015, p. 146)

Asperger syndrome is often perceived to be at the high-functioning end of the spectrum. Individuals with Asperger's syndrome are often able to communicate verbally and usually do not have intellectual disabilities. Still, they may express atypical behaviors that could be perceived as peculiar (Kuparinen, 2017).

4. TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO STUDENTS WITH AUTISM

English is widely recognized as a lingua franca, and learning a foreign language is much more than a tool. It forms a foundation for building bridges between people, cultures, and countries. It provides an opportunity for people who don't share the same language, culture, or background to connect and explore their differences and similarities.

English is a compulsory subject for all children from the first grade in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Learning a foreign language from a young age is challenging for every child, and it additionally puts learners with ASD in an unenviable situation. It can be very stressful for them to adapt to a completely different setting and atmosphere since most children with autism do not cope well with changes.

Four skills that permeate our English textbooks are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation are considered sub-skills (Katawazai, Haidari, and Sandaran, 2019). To be fluent, an English language learner must master all seven components. Although the literature on teaching EFL to children is becoming abundant, literature on teaching EFL to children with autism is very scarce. This raises awareness of the lack of literature and serves as a reminder that more research should be devoted to this specific topic. We shouldn't neglect students with SEN who need our help most and rely on us and our support to help them succeed in the future.

4.1. Strategies to Teach Reading

Popular teaching methods include "Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Direct Method (DM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Audio Lingual Method (ALM), and Silent Way (SW)" (Sanjaya et al., 2014, p. 9). However, combining multiple methods can lead to more efficient results. Ali and Razali (2019) point out that reading instruction and teaching strategies can be a cause of difficulties and that using diverse reading strategies is crucial. Sight vocabulary has been recognized as a valuable component skill in teaching reading to children with autism. Learning sight vocabulary can provide students with autism with the necessary everyday skills because they "could learn functional academics such as reading a list of grocery items or identifying the time or venue in a train schedule" (Yahya, Yunus, Toran, 2013, p. 267). We have already mentioned how we have different types of learners; among them, there are visual learners. Therefore, we expect that visualization, as a reading strategy, will be advantageous to visual learners.

> Visualization is a mental image created in a readers' mind while reading a text which brings words to life and helps them improve their reading comprehension skill. Asking sensory questions can help learners become better visualizers. (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016, p. 183)

Helpful strategies which can enhance reading skills are "predicting, forecasting, deducing, summarizing, examining, and evaluating" (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016, p.183). Applying these strategies is the most important, and there are many ways of implementing them in tasks; teachers need to experiment and be creative. Therefore, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) mention other helpful strategies to teach reading to EFL learners, such as reciprocal teaching, visualization, partner reading, instructional conversation, and running records.

Partner reading is a peer activity that fosters pair-work and utilizes peer assessment and positive feedback. It is important to encourage learners to find intrinsic motivation for reading and to motivate them to read different materials, find and recognize their difficulties, and develop their passion for reading.

The following table, presents a summary of effective strategies for teaching reading to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners with autism. The strategies listed in the table are supported by research and have been found to be beneficial in enhancing reading skills.

Table 3. *Strategies to Teach Reading.* The table is adapted from the following sources: Sanjaya et al. (2014), Ali and Razali (2019), Yahya, Yunus, Toran (2013), and Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016).

Strategy	Description
Sight vocabulary	Building students' vocabulary through the use of flashcards or word lists. Recognizing sight words can improve word recognition, phonological awareness, fluency, and reading comprehension.
Reciprocal teaching	A method that involves four strategies: predicting, summarizing, clarifying, and asking questions. It can help students develop more vital reading comprehension skills.
Visualization	Encouraging students to create mental images while reading to help them understand and remember the text. Asking sensory questions can also aid in this process.
Partner reading	Pairing students with a reading partner to read aloud to each other, answer questions, and provide feedback. This can be an excellent way to practice reading and improve motivation.

Instructional conversation	Class discussions that involve asking well-thought-out questions and making connections to other texts. This can help students understand the writer's intentions and improve their critical thinking skills.

4.2. Strategies to Teach Listening

Listening is a crucial skill for children learning English as a foreign language (EFL) but is also challenging due to a lack of emphasis on listening skills in schools. Proper communication is impossible without listening skills, which have often been undervalued as passive skills that develop on their own. However, listening is a daily used skill that develops faster than other language skills.

Cognitive strategies can be seen as problem-solving techniques because we use them to keep and use new information whenever needed. According to Conrad (1989), there are two types of cognitive listening strategies: bottom-up and top-down. "Bottom-up strategies are word-for-word translation, arranging the rate of speech, repeating the oral text, and concentrating on prosodic characteristics of the text" (Giljakani and Sabouri, 2016, p. 125). While the top-down strategies encompass more advanced strategies such as forecasting, guessing, and visualizing. The metacognitive strategy entails the learner being aware when listening to the text. "In this strategy, learners learn how to plan, monitor, and evaluate the collected information from the listening part" (Giljakani and Sabouri, 2016, p. 125). As the name implies, a socio-affective strategy is used in a social context. "Socio-affective strategies are techniques that listeners use to cooperate with others, to check their comprehension, and to reduce their apprehension" (Giljakani and Sabouri, 2016, p. 125).

The following table presents key strategies for teaching listening in EFL classroom. The strategies outlined in this table are based on the work of Giljakani and Sabouri (2016), who propose three main categories of listening strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio affective, and Conrad (1989) is referenced for the classification of cognitive listening strategies into bottom-up and top-down approaches.

Table 4. *Strategies to Teach Listening.* The table is adapted from Giljakani and Sabouri (2016) and Conrad (1989).

Strategies	Description
Cognitive	Use problem-solving techniques to understand and gather input in short-term or long-term memory. Can be broken down into bottom-up (word-for-word translation, arranging the rate of speech, repeating the oral text, and concentrating on prosodic characteristics of the text) and top-down (forecasting, guessing, and visualizing) strategies.
Metacognitive	Awareness when listening to the text. Plan, monitor, and evaluate the collected information from the listening part. Can increase confidence, motivation, and overall ability to complete the activity.
Socio-affective	Use techniques to cooperate with others, check comprehension, and reduce apprehension. Can reduce anxiety, boost confidence, raise motivation and strengthen relationships with others.

4.3. Strategies to Teach Writing

Teaching writing to EFL learners is challenging, and data shows that writing is the last domain to develop fully. The main reason for this is how students feel about writing and how they see themselves as writers. Instead of focusing on mistakes and criticizing, creating an encouraging atmosphere that motivates students to take risks in their writing, feel free, and believe in themselves is more important. One approach that overlooks grammatical errors is the Fluency First Approach. MacGowan-Gilhooly (1991) coined this term by explaining how students, only, when they learn to express themselves, can work on correcting their grammatical errors. Teacher feedback is crucial for the learner's confidence. Methods that can help activate prior knowledge are graphic organizers, cooperative reading, read-aloud, and group discussions. Another useful method is vocabulary preview. Scaffolding instruction is another way to build upon a student's strength. Vygotsky (1987) explained that scaffolding should be a contextual, social, and temporary framework supporting successful learning. Technology is also an excellent tool to polish students' writing skills.

The table below presents an overview of several key strategies that can be used to teach writing to EFL learners.

Table 5. *Strategies to Teach Writing.* The table is adapted from MacGowan-Gilhooly (1991) and Vygotsky (1987).

Strategies	Description
Fluency First Approach	Emphasizes expressing ideas over adhering to grammatical rules, with the goal of reducing stress and anxiety for students.
Activating Prior Knowledge	Methods such as graphic organizers, cooperative reading, read-aloud, and group discussions help activate students' prior knowledge and improve their writing skills.
Vocabulary Preview	Providing definitions of keywords before a writing task can help overcome vocabulary obstacles for English learners.
Scaffolding Instruction	Using a model such as IMSCI (Inquiry, Modeling, Shared, Collaborative, Independent) can help build upon students' strengths and support successful learning.
Technology Tools	Using technology such as e-journals and online discussion boards can provide students with a way to express themselves and practice their writing skills.
Journal Writing	Daily journal writing can allow for communication between teacher and students and provide individualized instruction.

4.4. Strategies to Teach Pronunciation and Communication

For successful and intelligible communication, good pronunciation is imperative. It is noted that teachers often struggle to incorporate pronunciation instruction into the curriculum, as the focus is often on communication without dedicating enough attention to pronunciation exercises. Levis and Grand (2003) propose three principles for integrating pronunciation instruction into the curriculum:

- Aim for a primary though not exclusive focus on suprasegmentals (stress, rhythm, and intonation)

- Maintain a central focus on speaking in class
- Pronunciation Instruction Should Fit the Constraints of the Speaking Task

The table below provides several strategies and activities that can be used to help learners improve their pronunciation.

Table 6. *Strategies to Teach Pronunciation and Communication.* The table is adapted from Levis and Grand (2003).

Strategies and activities	Description
Oral presentations	Prepare an oral presentation, identify key words to pronounce correctly, practice and record the presentation, listen to the recording and evaluate, receive feedback and revise the presentation, give the presentation in class, evaluate the pronunciation of key words
Word clarity exercise	Incorporate word clarity exercises in oral presentations, e.g., practice saying words clearly so that listeners can understand them
Phrasing and storytelling	Use personal stories, fables, fairy tales, and newspaper stories to practice phrasing and pronunciation
Intonation and conversation	Practice intonation and conversation through dialogues, use discourse markers and backchanneling to improve intonation
Focus and comparison-contrast writing	Explore the relationship between ideas through focus and comparison-contrast writing and use of Venn diagrams

4.5. Strategies to Teach Vocabulary

Teaching vocabulary in a foreign language is challenging but crucial for successful communication and comprehension in the target language. "While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972, p. 111-112). Vocabulary is vital for communication, and teachers play an influential role in

teaching vocabulary by deciding what their students learn, how they learn it and what methods and strategies they incorporate.

Teaching vocabulary to non-native speakers is demanding, but there are strategies that can help in improving vocabulary. As a solution to the slow development of vocabulary, it has been proposed to teach high-frequency words. "Words differ vastly in their frequency and coverage and, hence, learning worth – it is, therefore, imperative to choose words judiciously" (Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb, 2016, p. 231). In addition to focusing on high-frequency words, incorporating a wide range of reading materials and utilizing various strategies such as crossword puzzles, word cards, flashcards, and exploring synonyms and antonyms have proven to be highly effective approaches in vocabulary instruction. But the best motivator is intrinsic motivation. If students have that powerful drive to acquire a new language, they will show great results.

Phrasal verbs show various ways to use one word in different contexts. Omonova (2020) gave an example of amusing ways to use phrasal verbs with the word look: look - about/around, look after - be responsible for, look ahead - think about events in the future, look for -try to find, look out -take care, beware.

Incorporating poetry in EFL classrooms has been shown to be an effective strategy in teaching vocabulary. It can reduce anxiety and create meaningful situations for learners. Naturally, the more vocabulary we have and understand, the better communicators we will be.

To effectively teach vocabulary in a foreign language, there are a variety of strategies that can be employed. The table below lists different strategies and their respective descriptions.

Table 7. *Strategies to Teach Vocabulary.* Table adapted from Wilkins (1972), Siyanova-Chanturia and Webb (2016), and Omonova (2020).

Strategies	Description
High-Frequency Words	Teaching the most commonly used words in the target language.

Extra-Curricular Activities	Encouraging students to engage in activities outside of class such as reading and listening to music to enhance their vocabulary.
Crossword Puzzles	Using puzzles as a fun way to revise vocabulary.
Word Cards	Introducing new vocabulary words with pictures and written words on cards and allowing students to exchange them.
Synonyms and Antonyms	Engaging students in fun games with synonyms and antonyms to expand their vocabulary.
Phrasal Verbs and Idioms	Teaching idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs to show different ways to use one word in different contexts.
Poetry	Using literary texts to teach vocabulary in EFL classrooms as it reduces anxiety and creates meaningful situations for learners.

4.6. Strategies to Teach Grammar

Teaching grammar is controversial due to uncertainty on how to teach it (deductively, inductively, implicitly, or explicitly) and if it should be taught as a separate skill or integrated. According to research, grammar is primarily acquired through exposure to and usage of the language rather than solely through formal instruction. However, regardless of the teaching approach, grammar is essential for accuracy and proper language use. In addition, good grammar boosts learner confidence and communication skills.

The traditional approach to teaching grammar in EFL was the Grammar-Translation Method, but it has drawbacks: heavy use of students' native language, teacher-centered, and not challenging. This leads to students memorizing rules but not being able to apply them in communication, causing fear of grammar learning. "Under the Grammar-Translation method, students gained wide grammatical knowledge of the language but little communicative ability" (Hashemi & Daneshfar, 2018, p. 341).

The Audiolingual Method emerged as a reaction to the Grammar-Translation Method, emphasizing spoken language. But, like Grammar-Translation, it relied on memorization and repetition, leading to mistakes. Universal Grammar is a term coined by Noam Chomsky (1957). "Chomsky's theory proposes that the human brain contains a predefined

mechanism (universal grammar) that is the basis for the acquisition of all language" (Pinheiro, 2016, p. 36).

Teachers can take a deductive or inductive approach to teaching grammar. Deductive provides rules and specific language info. Inductive is a more holistic approach where students discover rules through experience. According to Chen (2016), methods following inductive learning are the Direct Method, Communicative Approach, and Counseling Learning.

The table below illustrates a few grammar teaching strategies, but the most appropriate method may differ depending on factors such as context, learner characteristics, goals, etc.

Table 8. *Strategies to Teach Grammar.* The table is adapted from Hashemi & Daneshfar (2018), Pinheiro (2016), and Chen (2016).

Strategies	Description
Audiolingual method	Emphasizes spoken language, uses memorization and repetition
Communicative Approach	Focuses on real-life communication and communicative competence
Deductive Approach	Teacher provides rules and specific language information
Direct Method	Teaches language through context and communicative activities
Inductive Approach	Students discover and implement rules through experience
Grammar-Translation	Emphasizes vocabulary and translation from native language

Using games as a strategy to teach grammar can prove to be effective. When designed with a purpose and challenge, and tailored to the learners' knowledge level, games can provide motivation, foster interest, and encourage teamwork in the learning process.

Yolageldili and Arikan (2011) recommend introducing games at three stages of teaching grammar. Before presenting the main grammatical structure, check what students already know. After grammar presentation, see how much they have acquired, and as a revision.

Games will inevitably become an indispensable part of English teaching, and it is up to teachers to test what works for them. As we will see through the research part, teachers try to socially engage students with autism by pairing them with a classmate or organizing group work. According to Waterford Institute (2021), there are social skills activities that can help students with autism understand social cues, develop empathy, and acquire other crucial life skills. One of the games teachers can introduce is "How Would It Feel To Be _____" teachers would ask students how it would be to be the story's main character. The game's purpose is to help students with autism develop empathy and recognize social cues by imagining themselves in the experiences of characters in stories. This activity can also teach them how to understand emotional perspectives. The Waterford Institute (2021) suggests a class should have a "Student Retreat Zone". That zone is a calming space for students who can get overwhelmed. That area should be filled with sensory toys, books, and activities that the student can access independently. Make it clear to all students that they can take a break in this space if they need to without singling out the student with autism. That's only two out of thirty activities offered by the Waterford Institute (2021) to assist teachers in the classroom.

5. TEACHING METHODS

The process of instructing individuals in the English language encompasses diverse methodologies and pedagogical techniques. Educators who teach English to students diagnosed with autism confront a multitude of challenges and obstacles. It is imperative that teachers identify ways to stimulate, engross, and sustain the interest of learners with autism in the subject matter. Unique teaching methods that support their cognitive and language development are essential. Among the various approaches, the Audiolingual method and TPR (Total Physical Response) have demonstrated noteworthy efficacy in the instruction of learners with autism.

5.1. Audiolingual Teaching Method

The Audiolingual method focuses on speaking while vocabulary and grammar are taught through repetition and dialogues.

The Audiolingual Method is such a methodology which combines pronunciation with intensive oral drillings of sentence patterns. Its procedures are as follows. A model dialogue is firstly presented to students. Then each line of the dialogue will be repeated by students, individually and in chorus. Sentences in each line may be broken down into some words or phrases if necessary. Next, pronunciation, intonation, and fluency will further be emphasized by the teacher. Correction of errors of pronunciation or grammar needs to be direct and immediate. (Wang, 2017, p. 39)

The Audiolingual method shows the importance of repetition and input for foreign language learning. Rezvani (2018) says that the method is vital since pupils with autism struggle with concentration and verbal production, and how crucial sensory input and repetition are for teaching. Many studies have shown that "learners with autism need extra time and more repetition in order to learn English vocabularies in comparison with normal students" (Rezvani, 2018, p.23). Understandably, people with autism require more time, attention, and effort to acquire a foreign language than other pupils. In addition, they have their learning preferences, whether kinesthetic, visual, or auditory. Teachers should be aware that pupils with autism usually do not have a long attention span, and they are unable to sit calmly throughout one lesson. Thus, teachers should be patient and empathetic and continuously explore new methods and strategies that will allow autistic learners to keep pace with their peers.

Furthermore, Rezvani (2018) advises how modifications in teaching methods can enhance English language learning of students with autism. That is why she recommends manipulating the surrounding, employing visuals, and modifying abstract concepts into concrete ones, which can facilitate better vocabulary learning. The Audiolingual method rests on behavioral psychology. "To behaviourists, a stimulus can be elicited to trigger a response" (Wang, 2017, p.39). According to Hall (2011), learners should respond to a stimulus and be positively reinforced to acquire another language. The Audiolingual approach is mainly passive since learners are passive recipients and respond to stimuli, but they have no control of the pace or content. Learners are encouraged to repeat words, phrases, and sentences even if they do not understand their meaning.

American English (2013) exemplifies the utilization of the Audio-Lingual method in language classrooms. Despite its age, the video showcases the advantages of this approach in language acquisition and retention. [1]

5.2. Audiovisual Teaching Method

One of the most prominent characteristics of people with ASD are atypical communicative abilities. The results of this paper's qualitative research have also confirmed the importance of this teaching method based on the behaviorist approach, which relies on habit formation. This method originates from France, and according to Atiyah and Izzah (2019), it accompanies sounds and images, and according to Christensen (1970), there had to be a method that would encompass listening, reading, and understanding, therefore, resulting in the creation of the Audiovisual method of teaching.

> Audio-visual teaching as such is nothing new. It is a method as old as human society; it is the method by which the children of our earliest ancestors learned to speak, or rather to communicate, with one another. Objects were pointed out, sounds were uttered and imitated by the child. In the acquisition of the mother tongue this has not changed throughout the ages. Yet, in formal teaching, particularly that of languages, we may confidently say that it is a completely new approach. (Christensen, 1970, p. 63)

Nevertheless, resourceful teachers found a way to incorporate the method into their lessons and facilitate lesson plans. Additionally, technological advancements further increased teachers' freedom in creativity, allowing them to have fun and educational activities. The benefits of the method are explained in detail below, and which aspects of the English language the method encompasses.

> When teachers bring video materials into their English classrooms, students can directly acquire a great amount of cultural background information and emotional attitudes about the learning materials. Therefore, they could employ their autonomy in language learning. (Bajrami and Ismaili, 2016, p. 503)

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[1] The video is available by clicking on the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz0TPDUz3FU

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Audiovisual materials are a valuable tool for language teachers to enhance their students' learning experience. When selecting a material, there are several factors teachers must pay attention to. Choosing meaningful material that is relevant to the lesson, appropriate for the student's age, and relevant to their attention span.

According to Wright (1976), all audiovisual materials positively contribute to language learning when used at the right time and place. Audiovisual aids can be implemented for specific tasks or for the entire lesson. However, presenting the material before assignments can be beneficial for students.

According to Paulsen (2001), "It is no longer a question of whether to take advantage of these electronic technologies in foreign language instruction, but of how to harness them and guide our students in their use" (Paulsen, 2001, para 3.).

5.3. Total Physical Response

TRP (Total Physical Response) is a combination of speech and action. The main focus is to teach the English language through physical activity, and it is also known as the natural method of language acquisition.

> Learners are required to follow a series of commands and then to respond physically before they start to produce verbal responses. At the beginning of learning phase, the occurrence of errors can be allowed. Along with deepening language knowledge, the teacher should increasingly intervene and correct leaners' mistakes so that more fine-tuned expressions can be produced by learners. (Wang, 2017, p. 39)

In contrast to the Audiolingual method, TPR learners are not passive. Instead, they are active, and "TPR was confirmed to be an appropriate method for teaching English vocabulary for children since this method teaches the language similarly as the process that the children learned their native language" (Adisti, 2020, p. 20). The TPR method was developed in 1988 by Dr. James J. Asher. Asher (1988) listed three processes of language acquisition for children:

1. Children develop listening competence before they develop the ability to speak at the early stage of first language acquisition.

2. Children's ability in listening comprehension is acquired because they are required to respond physically to spoken language in the form of parental commands.

3. Once a foundation in listening comprehension has been established, speech evolves naturally and effortlessly out of it.

5.4. Final Remarks on Audiolingual, Audiovisual and TPR methods

While these methods have advantages and disadvantages, it is up to the teacher to determine how to integrate and combine the most effective elements of each approach. According to Wang (2017), the Audiolingual method is notable for enhancing students' pronunciation, stress, rhythm, intonation, fluency, and accuracy due to its emphasis on immediate correction. However, it also has certain drawbacks. For example, Wang (2017) warns that learners can develop mechanical learning habits and overlook real-life experiences outside the classroom.

Similarly, the strong points of the Audiovisual method are variety and creativity. However, challenges such as fitting a well-planned lesson into a very limited timeframe, required equipment and cost that comes with it, and possible disengagement of the students are certain drawbacks of which teachers should be aware.

The TPR method doesn't encourage immediate correction; teachers tolerate mistakes because they expect students to make errors initially. However, it has been observed that by utilizing the TPR approach, learners often use a minimal number of words, phrases, or sentences. But the TRP method allows students to learn in a stress-free environment.

Finally, combining all three language teaching methods can result in a productive approach to teaching EFL to students with ASD.

6. THE STUDY ON TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS TO STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Teachers encounter significant hurdles in effectively implementing inclusion practices, resulting in a substantial disparity between their aspirations and practical limitations. They confront classroom challenges and grapple with inadequate assistance and support from external sources on a regular basis. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to gain insight into the challenges and experiences of teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia when

teaching EFL to children with autism. Furthermore, the paper examines various strategies and approaches that can potentially enhance the learning outcomes of children with autism. This section of the paper will present the results of the study on teaching English as a foreign language in primary schools to students with an autism spectrum disorder.

6.1. Research Goals and Objectives

The main goal of the research was to explore the best strategies and methods which helped with teaching EFL to children with autism. Furthermore, the aim was to see if teachers collaborate with parents and other professionals, and to see in which areas they need help the most. Another goal was to see if teachers had any professional development in order to assist children with autism spectrum disorder in primary schools, and their general observation on the context of teaching EFL to students with autism.

The following hypotheses were set at the beginning of this study:

1. EFL teachers don't feel competent to teach in an inclusive environment. i.e., EFL teachers don't get enough support nor opportunities for professional development in order to feel prepared for challenges faced in an inclusive environment.
2. EFL teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and EFL teachers in Serbia face the same challenges when teaching EFL to children with autism, i.e., teaching EFL to children with autism is equally difficult for teachers from both countries.
3. EFL teachers implement different teaching methods to teach EFL to children with autism, i.e., EFL teachers use different teaching methods such as Total Physical Response (TPR), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), or The Audio-Visual Method to teach EFL to children with autism.
4. EFL teachers collaborate with parents and other professionals when teaching EFL to children with autism.

The main goal of this study is to shed light on the insufficiently explored area of teaching EFL to children with ASD. Furthermore, the aim is to raise awareness about the lack of professional development and support for teachers in inclusive settings. Finally, the goal of the paper is to confirm whether EFL teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia face the same difficulties in their classrooms. Hopefully, this paper will encourage EFL teachers from both countries to collaborate and share their experiences.

6.2. Research Questions

In compliance with the purpose of the study and its goals and objectives, the following questions have been formed. However, it is important to note that the questionnaire consisted of two parts, section 1. and section 2. (See Appendix 1). Section 1. contained basic questions regarding educational background, the country teachers are from, and their years of teaching experience. Section 2. was more concerned with actual EFL teaching to children with autism.[2]

6.3. Research Instruments and Data Collection

The data used in the analysis was gathered through qualitative research using interviews and questionnaires. A total of four (4) participants took part in the research using a questionnaire, and eight (8) participants took part in an interview. All participants are EFL teachers in primary schools, and the number of participants is equally divided between countries. Six participants are from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and six are from Serbia. The questionnaire was sent to participants in English. The interview consisted of ten questions and was conducted in English as well.

Due to the circumstances in which the research took place, the sample size of participants was smaller. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the hectic schedule of teachers adjusting to the new ways of teaching using online platforms, only 12 participants were willing to participate in the research. Additionally, due to the specific parameters of this research, it was difficult to find teachers who have experience teaching EFL to children with autism in primary schools from both countries. Therefore, all participants were guaranteed anonymity. EFL teachers, who completed the questionnaire, were numerically coded (from 1 to 4) based on the order in which they replied to the questions. EFL teachers who participated in the interview were coded alphabetically to protect their privacy.

The interview had to be conducted online because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was sent to the teachers, and the interview was conducted online via Zoom. The duration of the interview was approximately half an hour. The topic and purpose of the research were explained to the teachers, and they gave their permission to be recorded. As previously stated, the interview was conducted in English. However, if some teachers

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[2] The interview questions were adapted from the following sources: Azad, Wolk, and Mandell (2018), Gür and Yikmis (2021), and Savić and Prošić-Santovac (2017)

preferred to answer in their native language, the researcher allowed it and later translated their answers. Teachers were not required to speak in English if they didn't want to.

6.4. Research Limitations

The first limitation was the number of participants from both countries. Twelve (12) participants were not enough to cover a realistic situation of teaching EFL to children of autism in two countries. This means that the findings may not be applicable to other contexts or populations. Therefore, future studies should consider a larger sample size to increase the validity of the findings.

The second limitation was that some answers were hard to analyze. During the interview, teachers were asked open-ended questions. Sometimes, they would continue talking about certain situations that may not be relevant to the study, making it harder for the researcher to put their answers in the correct context. Further, in the questionnaire, they would answer with a simple yes or no to an open-ended question without further elaboration. These types of answers were difficult to analyze.

Another limitation of this study is that the participants were from only two countries in the Balkans region. As such, the findings may not be generalizable to other regions or cultures. Future studies could include participants from a broader range of regions and cultures to examine potential cross-cultural differences in teaching EFL to children with ASD.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 7.1. Qualitative Data Results

The questionnaire was completed by 4 EFL teachers, two teachers are from Bosnia and Herzegovina and two from Serbia. The following table provides basic information about the participants. However, it is important to note that information about gender, education and years of teaching experience was fulfilled by all 12 participants, the rest of the survey, namely, section 2, was completed only by 4 teachers. Out of the 12 participants, 75% were female teachers and 25% male teachers. The researcher wanted equal number of participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. So, six teachers, 50%, are from Bosnia and Herzegovina and six, 50%, are from Serbia. Their years of experience teaching English vary, majority of teachers had 10 or more years of teaching and only two participants, 16.7%, had three years of teaching.

Figure 1. Teaching Experience of Participants Teaching EFL: Teacher Survey

**Years of Experience Teaching EFL**
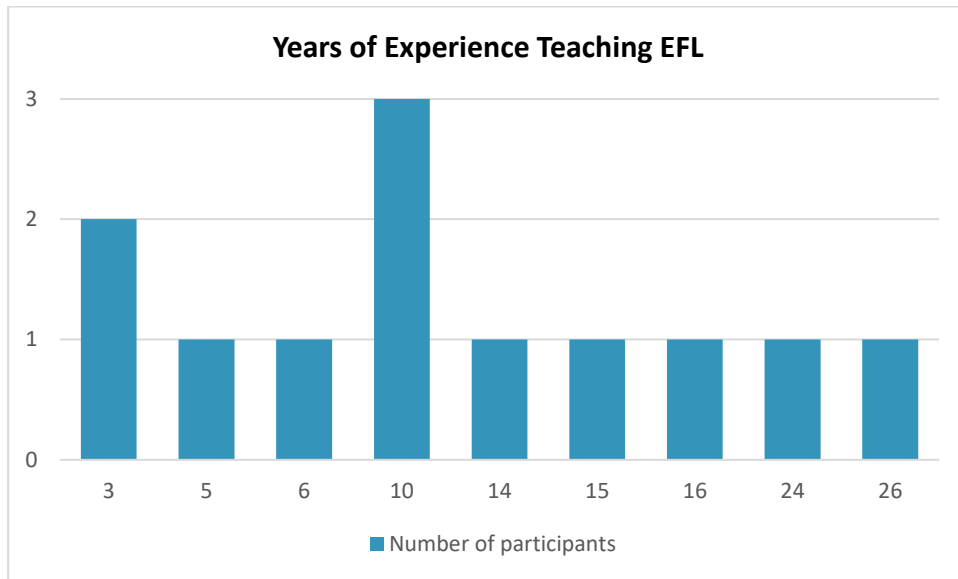
They all had experience teaching children with autism since that was a requirement to participate in the survey. However, their years of experience working with children with autism are different. The majority of participants, 33.3%, had one year of experience, and the teacher with the most experience had worked 13 years with children with autism.

Figure 2. Teaching Experience of Participants Teaching EFL to Students with Autism: Teacher Survey

**Years of Experience Teaching EFL to Students with ASD**
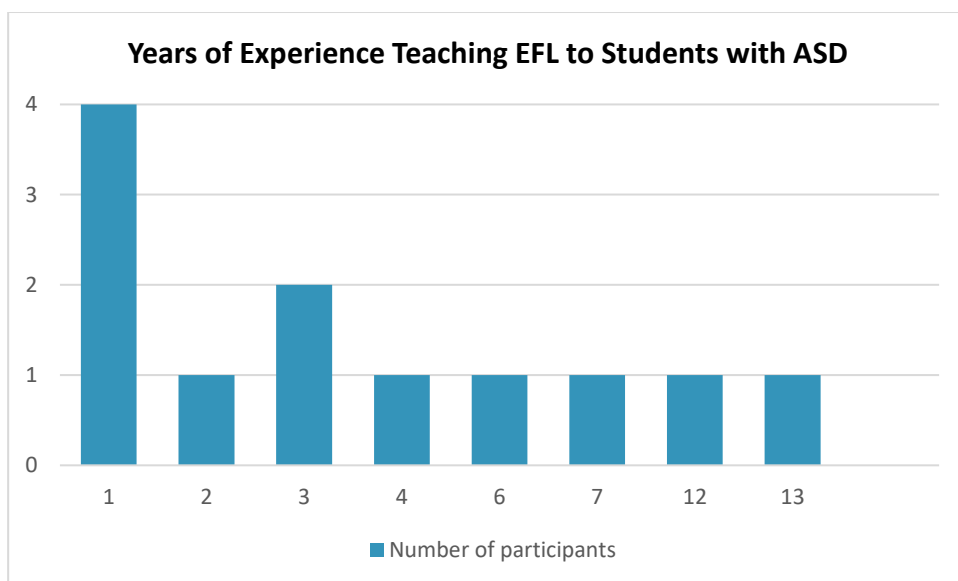
In the following questions participants were asked are about their education and professional development. The participants were asked if they had any courses related to teaching a child with autism during their education. Only two participants, 17 %, answered that they had some courses during their education while the rest didn't have any.

Figure 3. Teaching Experience and Education Related to Autism Among EFL Teachers for Students with Autism: Teacher Survey

During your education, have you had any courses related to teaching children with ASD

■ Yes ■ No
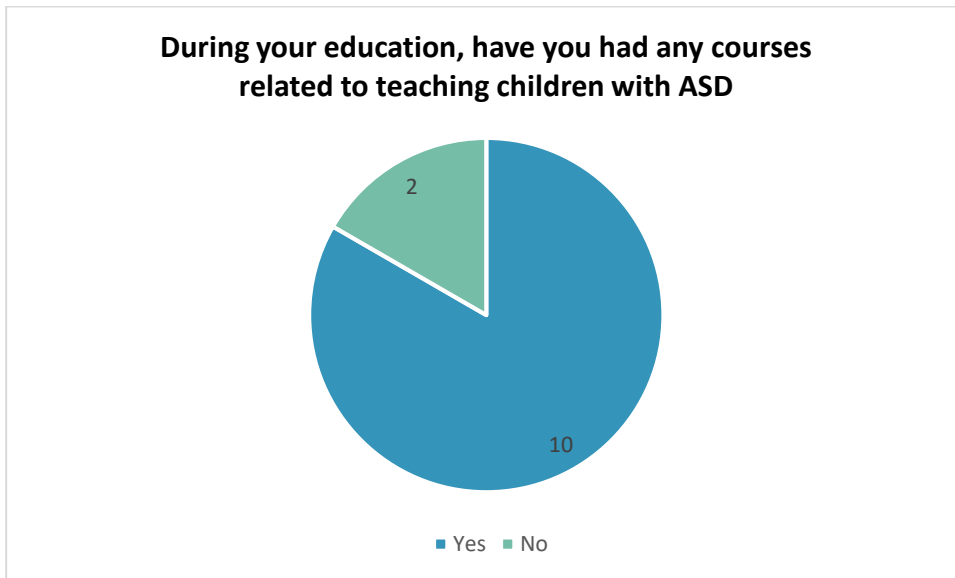
However, when asked about their professional development activities related to working with a child with autism, their answers were equally divided.

Figure 4. EFL Teachers' Professional Development Activities Related to Children with Autism: Teacher Survey

Have you had any professional development activities related to working with children with ASD

■ Yes ■ No
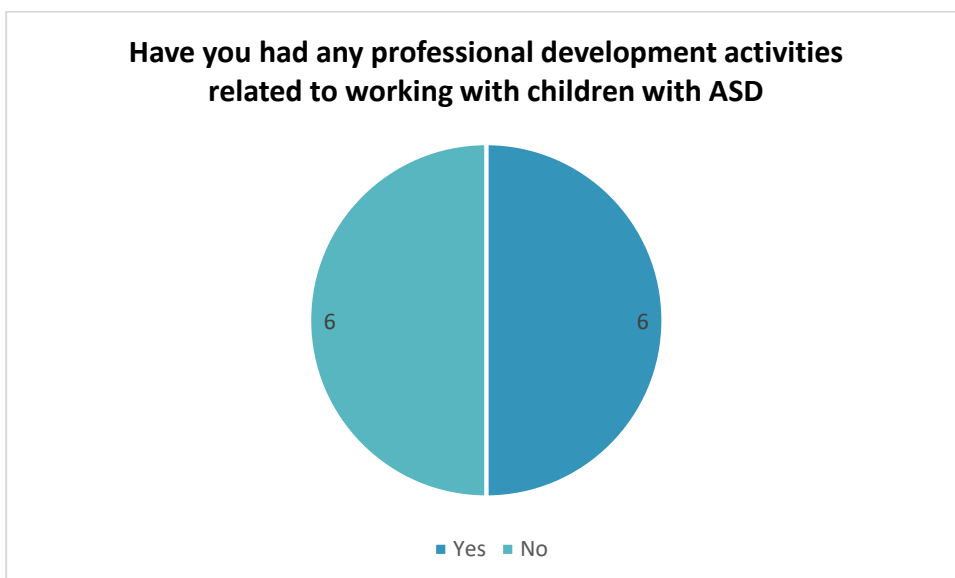
When asked what type of professional development activities they had, the most frequent answers were seminars, workshops, and collaboration with experts such as speech therapists, sociologists, speech therapists etc.

The final question regarding data on the participants was about their independent learning about children with autism and the best ways to work with them. Surprisingly, out of 12 participants, only 1 participant answered that they haven't tried to independently learn about children with autism and ways to assist them. While the rest of the participants, 92%, replied that they did.

Figure 5. EFL Teachers' Independent Learning About Children with Autism and Best Practices: Teacher Survey
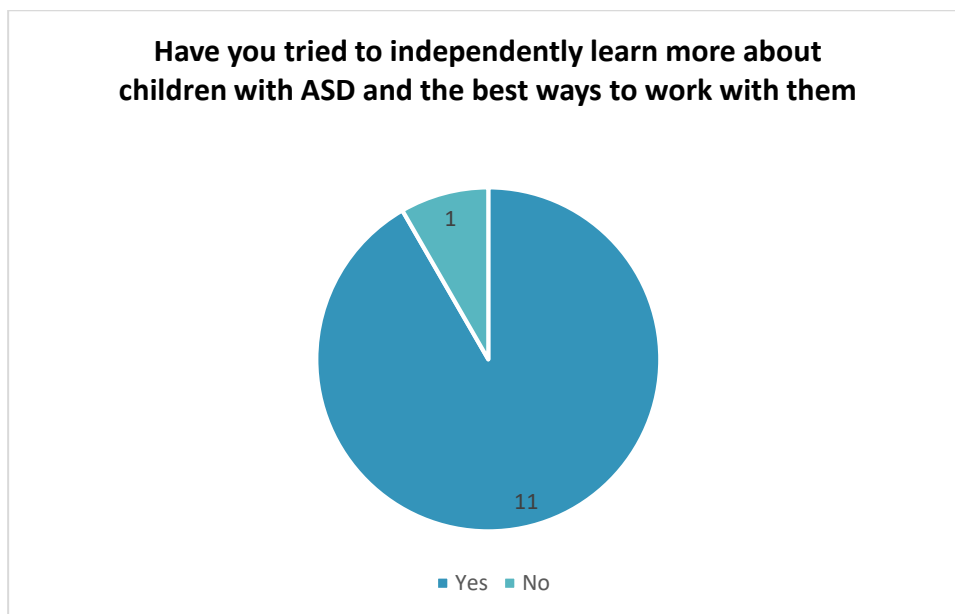
Above was presented section 1 of the survey. When we compare EFL teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, we can notice that their educational background, experience, and dedication are very similar. There is no huge gap between participants. However, what was surprising is that one teacher replied that they had not tried to learn independently about children with autism and the best ways to teach EFL. We don't know if the teacher didn't need to learn independently because their school offered everything they needed, or what was the context behind this answer. It is encouraging to see that most teachers have participated in some sort of professional development activities and that they are willing to learn independently about children with autism despite their poor experience

after finishing their formal education. Section 2 consists of questions specific to teaching methods, strategies, collaboration with parents and professionals.

7.2. Questionnaire Data Results and Discussion

This section was only fulfilled by four participants, two from Bosnia and Herzegovina and two from Serbia. Teachers were numerical coded (from 1 to 4) based on their replying order.

Table 9

Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Primary Schools to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Results from Interviews

Pp.	Strategies to teach EFL to children with ASD	Teaching methods	Learning theories	Collaboration	EFL teachers' professional development needs.
1	Gestures, repetition, music, and individual work	PPT, TPR, Audio-lingual	Not specified	Parents and school professionals	Courses on SEN, more equipped schools, and funding.
2	Intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, praise, stickers, and toys	Visual learning and tangible exercises.	Not specified	School pedagogue, speech therapist and parents.	More courses on SEN at the faculty level and more practice for future EFL teachers.
3	Individual work with the assistant when the child gets stressed	Learning through play, TPR, Audio-visual learning.	Not specified	Open to collaborate, if necessary, but currently not needed	Funding for computers, tablets, and games.

| 4 | CLT, repetition, and assistive technology. | Visual aid, games, songs, and music. | Not specified | Parents, pedagogue, psychologist, and speech therapist | Funding for computers, tablets, and games |

Note. The table provides a distilled overview of the key aspects of the research and does not encompass all questions surveyed in the questionnaire.

The results from the questionnaire showed that all four participants agreed that strategies need to be modified for students with ASD. One participant mentioned the use of the communicative approach and observing the behavior when a child is requesting something and, over time, improving their communication skills. Another participant stated that whenever they notice low motivation, they rely on intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, such as reinforcement, stickers, and praise. Several participants mentioned how their assistants are vital when conducting a lesson. All participants agreed that it is imperative to use gestures, repetition, and simple sentence construction and to dedicate individual attention to help them understand the lesson better. Teaching EFL to children with ASD does not drastically differ from the rest of their peers. Teachers mostly employ the same strategies and methods, but they reinforce them more frequently. However, the participants agreed that grammar teaching is the most challenging part. One participant mentioned that grammar is an abstract concept, and students with ASD may have difficulty understanding it. Therefore, teachers must evaluate the severity of autism and make a decision on whether that aspect of EFL would be possible to teach or if they should resort to other parts from which they would benefit more.

In response to the question about teaching methods, the participants provided a range of teaching methods they use when teaching EFL to children with autism. These include PPT, TPR, audiolingual, visual aids, games, songs, and music. One participant emphasized the importance of making everything visual and tangible and using social and material reinforcement. In contrast, when asked if they employ any learning theories, all participants responded that they do not apply them when teaching EFL to children with autism. It is unclear whether this is because they do not believe learning theories are relevant or because they have not received training on how to apply learning theories in classes with SEN.

Furthermore, when asked about collaboration with parents and other professionals, only one teacher reported that they do not collaborate with parents due to their student's high achievement and independence. Therefore, currently, they do not need to involve parents, but if there is ever a need for that, the teacher emphasized that they would gladly incorporate it. On the contrary, all other participants emphasized the importance of collaboration with parents and other available professionals in order to provide the best possible education and environment for their students with ASD. They noted that the parents' insight is very valuable, and that the expertise provided by school pedagogues, psychologists, and speech therapists is vital in their teaching. This only shows that the severity of autism is a great indicator of whether a teacher should get involved in collaboration with experts and parents.

Regarding professional development needs, participants identified a range of areas where they could benefit from further education and training. These included more courses on how to teach EFL to students with SEN, more preparation and education for future teachers at the faculty level, and access to equipment such as tablets and computers because the teachers have been acquainted with the benefits of technology in classes with SEN. Participants also called for more opportunities for collaboration and knowledge-sharing among teachers and increased funding and support from the government and schools to facilitate necessary changes.

7.3. Interview Data Results and Discussion

The interview had eight participants, four from Bosnia and Herzegovina and four from Serbia. They are all EFL teachers who have experience teaching children with autism. The interview was conducted via the Zoom platform and consisted of ten questions. EFL teachers who participated in the interview were coded using alphabetical letters based on the order in which they answered the interview questions.

1. **What teaching strategies do you apply to teach listening, reading, writing and pronunciation in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students? Or do they need to be different?**

Analyzing the responses from the teachers who participated in the research proved challenging due to their experience with students with ASD. While some teachers have high-functioning students who are able to keep up with their peers and excel, others work with almost non-verbal students with ASD who require much effort and attention.

However, based on their answers, they apply strategies that align with the concepts mentioned in the theoretical part of the paper. For example, participant A explained how they rely on repetition and, as previously stated, repetition together with positive reinforcement are fundamental parts of Behaviorist theory and Audiolingual teaching method. Additionally, teachers mentioned the importance of individualized approach and instruction, as one teacher mentioned the importance of checking if their student with ASD needs any adjustments or clarification. They also noted that it is imperative to check students' moods to predict their behavior that day. Additionally, teachers often rely on their teaching assistants, who are considered indispensable in providing support and assistance.

Finally, participant F noted the importance of flashcards and video games in teaching children with ASD. As previously mentioned, sight vocabulary is an excellent way to build students' vocabulary through the use of flashcards. In addition, participant F highlighted the importance of learning through play and the use of technology such as smart boards. Participant F stated the following, "I use flashcards and video games. ... We learn through playing, and I think they like movement. ... They love clicking on things, and they like technology".

Studies have shown that technology can be a valuable tool in the education of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as it has the potential to enhance their learning experience and make it more enjoyable. Finally, like many other teachers, participant F emphasized the value of visual aids such as pictures and videos, which has been acknowledged as an excellent strategy to engage children with ASD.

2. **What teaching strategies do you apply to teach vocabulary in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students, or do they need to be different?**

The strategies don't differentiate much from the previous question. What is important to note is that teachers are aware of the effects that correction can have on students and their confidence. One teacher noted that they always make sure to implement positive corrections, praise, and gestures. Two participants affirmed the effectiveness of Total Physical Response (TPR) as a teaching method, which emphasizes physical movement, memorization, and active listening to facilitate learning. Existing research suggests that TPR can be particularly beneficial for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

due to its direct and multisensory instructional strategies, which foster a relaxed learning environment. Furthermore, one teacher shared a practical activity called the tossing game, which promotes collaborative learning through play.

The third question is about teaching grammar to children with autism. The researcher is aware that this question poses significant difficulty as teaching grammar remains a complex task even in standard classroom settings. However, for the sake of the research, the researcher wanted to incorporate all aspects of the English language.

3. **What teaching strategies do you apply to teach grammar in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students, or do they need to be different?**

As previously indicated, it was anticipated that this question would be the most complex to answer, and it was most likely that teachers who have students with severe ASD are not able to teach grammar. Therefore, five teachers responded negatively, stating that it is impossible to teach grammar as it is too complex for their students to understand. However, those who can teach grammar gave several valuable tips and strategies. Participant B mentioned how they prepare their students beforehand and let them know what they can expect from the lesson. The teacher explained how their student has emotional reactions when they make a mistake, and the teacher learned how to manage those reactions. Namely, the teacher gives the student assurance and lets them know that mistakes are just part of the learning process. Giving students space to make mistakes is crucial in the learning process. Participant F noted that although their students can't understand grammar, it is essential to keep them included and never exclude them from the learning process. Participant G, who has an older student, remarked how mind maps were helpful in teaching grammar and recapitulating what has been learned so far. The teacher also mentioned that YouTube proved to be an excellent tool for teaching simple grammar.

From their experience, it seems that teachers who can utilize grammar teaching rely on the inductive approach and try to make students make their conclusions and learn from their own experiences. Teaching grammar is a challenging but not impossible task. With careful planning, preparation, and utilization of valuable strategies, teachers can ensure their linguistic development.

The fourth and final question regarding the English components is about communication.

4. What teaching strategies do you apply to teach communication in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students, or do they need to be different?

After analyzing the responses of the participants, it can be inferred that teachers predominantly utilize the Total Physical Response (TPR) and Audio-visual method in conjunction with repetition when teaching communication skills to students with autism. It is important to make simple and short sentences and learn their preferences.

It can be observed that several factors can affect the quality of lessons, such as duration, attention span, frequency of the English language class, the order in which classes are placed, etc. Some teachers cannot do much with their students; others were able to achieve remarkable success. Parental involvement and expectations are additional factors that can affect teachers and their quality of teaching to students with autism. Nevertheless, all teachers agreed on the significance of demonstrating empathy and understanding toward their students. The strategies teachers use to teach communication are also applicable to other components of the English language. There were no specific strategies mentioned, only narrowed to teaching communication. However, what could be beneficial for teachers to implement, and is mentioned in the theoretical framework as one of the strategies to teach communication, is storytelling. There are numerous ways in which teachers can make storytelling a part of their communication teaching strategy. Storytelling is a versatile strategy that can be used in various forms to enrich communication teaching strategies. Empirical research supports the potential of storytelling as an effective way to increase attention span and improve communication, including social interactions.

The next question concerns learning preferences. The researcher is aware that they differ and are not something teachers can generalize. However, based on several answers, it was confirmed that there was noticeable progress once students with autism were put together to work in pairs or groups.

5. From your experience, do children with autism prefer working individually, in pair work, or group work?

Based on all the answers, several things can be confirmed. Learning preferences are not constant; pair work and group work should be introduced slowly. A lot depends on the students' mood and according to that, teachers should decide whether to give them personal space, include them in pair-work or group-work. Sometimes offering a leadership position to a child with autism can give them a sense of responsibility, making the child feel special and bring the best out of them. Participant D mentioned how their student enjoyed group-work and how it facilitated leadership skills which were previously unknown to the teacher.

Furthermore, many teachers have confirmed that pair work is more reasonable because it is less stressful. Pair work and group work improve social skills only when the student feels accepted and welcomed. Teachers shouldn't pressure anything, but they should occasionally try out to see which learning preference is the most effective. Participant E shared how their student finds great pleasure in working in pairs and how their communication is more effective through that partnership. Participant E's experience highlights the potential benefits of pair-work for students with ASD, as it can facilitate communication and emotional recognition with peers. As such, it is crucial for teachers to explore various learning approaches and identify what works best for their classroom.

6. Do you apply any learning theories when teaching EFL to a child with autism?

Based on the gathered answers, it appears that the teachers surveyed do not firmly believe in the application of learning theories when teaching English as a foreign language to students with autism. Nearly all respondents stated that they do not use any theories. Only two participants mentioned the use of Cognitive learning theory and Humanistic learning theory. However, they noted that they only use certain components of these theories and were reluctant to go into further details.

Their answers clearly indicated that they don't have enough time to devote to utilizing learning theories and that they don't see any purpose in doing so. They don't believe that adhering to learning theories can improve their teaching. However, it is probable that they unintentionally apply some parts of learning theories without realizing it. This question seemed to agitate teachers, and theories were depicted as unrealistic expectations. One teacher expressed how they do not see the purpose of teaching English to students with ASD, but instead, they should be taught practical skills used in everyday life.

Overall, it is evident that teachers are doing their best in accommodating and finding the best method. Since many teachers have limited experience working with children with SEN, they are still experimenting and trying out different approaches. Naturally, they need time and space to learn and grow, particularly when dealing with unique challenges like those posed by students with SEN.

7. Do you apply any teaching methods when teaching EFL to a child with autism?

Based on the answers provided, teachers employ a variety of teaching methods. The methods mentioned by the participants in the interview were discussed within the context of the theoretical framework, which emphasizes the effectiveness of these methods for teaching EFL to students with ASD. Out of 8 teachers who participated in the research, one teacher doesn't use any methods (12.5%), while three teachers (37.5%) utilize the audio-visual method of teaching, including Participants B, C, and D.

In the case of participant B, their student is a visual learner, and the teacher carefully combines visuals with audio to facilitate the student's learning. However, the teacher is cautious not to use loud activities that might trigger the student's emotional reaction. One crucial element mentioned in the answer is whenever the teacher noticed that the student would have an emotional reaction, the teacher would go outside the classroom with the student, and his assistant would take care of the student. This type of action prevents the student from disrupting the class and making other students uneasy simultaneously; the student can remain calm in a different classroom with the assistant. Moreover, the teacher establishes trust with the student and follows a routine that effectively minimizes possible consequences. Participant C, on the other hand, is more concerned with the number of classes their student with autism has. Once again, the teacher emphasizes that it is more important to teach some vital skills that they will use later in life. The teacher believes that the student with autism is pressured into doing more than they are capable of.

Participants E, F, and G (37.5%) utilize Total Physical Response (TPR) and songs. Participant F (12.5%) uses Project-based learning as a teaching method in conjunction with TPR. However, this may be due to the age of the student. Unlike other teachers, this teacher is working with an older student.

Overall, the findings suggest that teachers are mindful of adapting their teaching methods to suit the individual needs of their students. Previously, we discussed three types of

learners, visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/tactile. By being mindful of all the methods above, teachers are making sure that every type of learner is included. Additionally, they individualize and adjust teaching resources and materials to be available to all students.

8. How do you assess a child with autism?

Teachers provided a mixture of opinions. Among the 8 participants, 37.5% (participants A, C, and F) believed that grading was unnecessary for students with ASD. While, on the other hand, those who have students with high-functioning autism can grade them with ease. For example, participant B stated "In my case, the assessment was very easy. There was no difference between him and the rest of the class".

Participants C, D, F and G (62.5%) follow Individual Plan and Program (IPP), while participant E is currently working on having IPP approved for their student. Indicating the importance of having IPP when working with children who require a different approach and adjustments. On the contrary, participant D mentioned how they like to stimulate their student through grades, and they follow IPP. Extrinsic stimulation can serve as a great motivator for children and encourage them to give their best effort.

Based on all the answers, it can be concluded that teachers who work with more severe cases of autism don't give much significance to grades. Instead, they would prefer marking accomplishments and tracking progress. Two teachers have observed that kind words, positive reinforcement, and praise are far more important than grades. It is crucial to consider that giving the highest grades to a student with autism can result in jealousy from other classmates. To foster understanding and prevent discomfort or jealousy, it is essential for teachers to be honest and transparent about the grading system. Teachers need to be mindful to avoid any potential for mockery or negative reactions. Every teacher should get to know their students and, with that knowledge, do what they think it's best to prevent other students from feeling discomfort concerning grades.

9. Do you collaborate with parents or other professionals? (If so, please describe in what ways does the collaboration with parents and professionals help. What are the benefits of that cooperation?)

Teachers encounter several obstacles when it comes to collaboration with parents and professionals. One major issue is that some parents may have difficulty accepting that their

child has SEN. Namely, 62.5% of participants reported encountering uncomfortable situations with parents who were resistant to the idea that their child may have ASD. In addition, it is extremely difficult when the teacher is the first to notice that a child has difficulties, and they must inform the parents. Participant E noted, "Sometimes, the teachers are the first to notice a problem, and they have to come in front of parents and say that they've noticed a difficulty. It is not an easy thing to do. No one wants their child to be less progressive than other children".

The other obstacle is explained by participant A, who explained that collaboration was impossible due to the mother's mental health. The mother saw the school as a safe space for the student, and the student would spend most of the time there. "So, in that way, he was safe while at school, but if we look from the point of education, nothing, actually, we couldn't do anything for him". This exemplifies how social status and students' backgrounds can further hinder a challenging situation.

Despite these challenges, most participants (75%) reported collaborating with psychologists, speech therapists, doctors, and sociologists. They recognized the importance of this collaboration in supporting the development and progress of children with ASD. Participant E noted that even communication with other teachers could be insightful. "I also think good communication with other teachers is crucial. For example, a math teacher helped me a lot with my students. She will give me heads up if the child is sad or nervous".

There were, however, two teachers that don't collaborate with parents or other professionals. Participant H indicated that their student was performing well and did not require additional attention at the moment, but the teacher expressed support for collaboration if needed. Participant C cited the lack of time and unrealistic expectations from the mother as reasons why they do not engage in collaboration with parents or professionals. "I don't keep in touch with his doctor or school psychologist in terms of professionals. I don't have time for that. You have to understand that we have a lot of children and very little time to deal with such problems".

Overall, the responses highlighted the importance of collaboration in supporting students with ASD, with all participants working towards a common goal of providing the best learning experience for their students. It is encouraging to see that many schools have

professionals paying individual attention to children with SEN. Despite the challenges, the teachers are aware of the benefits that collaboration brings.

10. **In which aspect of the teaching English to the autistic child do you need professional development most?**

The responses from the participants indicate a range of perspectives on professional development. The majority of teachers (62.5%) expressed a preference for a model that includes alternating between regular and special schools. Teachers agreed that alternation between two schools would be most beneficial for the children with ASD. According to participant A, professionals from special schools should teach complex subjects such as math, native language, and foreign language. On the other hand, classes such as art and music, which are more relaxing, should be taught in a regular classroom. By introducing this model, the student is believed to get the best of both worlds.

They would also like to have guidance on the abilities of their students. They would like to know where to focus in teaching and what their students are able to learn and what to avoid. Thus, they believe that the quality of their classes would increase if they had more time and fewer students in one class.

Participant D strongly advises that there should be a catalog for external graduation specifically aimed toward children with autism. The teacher would also like access to more exercises and teaching materials that have been proven effective for children with ASD.

25% of the participants expressed that they believe their teaching assistants lack competence in supporting children with ASD and require more professionals who specialize in this area to assist them with their teaching.

Teachers expressed the need for more seminars, workshops, and webinars on SEN. One teacher noted that the Ministry of Education should cover the expenses. Participant H remarked how it is crucial to learn how to find resources and to focus on assertive communication. The participants also called for the cooperation of NGOs with the University and an inclusion program at every faculty, no matter what they study.

However, only one participant said they didn't want additional support and education. "Honestly, I am not very much interested in professional development. I deal with it because I need to, but I am not interested in it". The teacher believes that children with SEN

are in mainstream schools primarily for socialization and that it is not up to the teacher to develop strategies but that they need expert guidance.

It can be concluded that teachers need help. Although some schools have professionals like speech therapists and pedagogues included, they are preoccupied because there are not enough of them, so they cannot dedicate enough attention to teachers and assist them properly. Teachers feel that parents would trust them more and wouldn't be very reluctant to have their children evaluated if professionals were more involved. Creating IPP for children with severe autism is especially critical for children with severe autism, but without parents' approval to evaluate their children, teachers are limited in their ability to help. Teachers feel that this is only achievable by collaborating with an expert who will be able to provide the above-mentioned guidance. Teachers also encourage parents to work more closely with their children at home. Helping with their homework and school chores. They find that their involvement is necessary for the success of every aspect of a child's education. Ultimately, teachers and parents must work together to help students reach their full potential.

8. CONCLUSION

According to the analysis done in this paper, it can be concluded that EFL teachers struggle to teach children with autism due to various factors such as lack of support, funding, and professional assistance. While the importance of teaching assistants is recognized, there is still a long way ahead for inclusion in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia to prosper. Teachers often lack experience and knowledge in assisting children with autism, and their limited time and large class sizes make it challenging to create a conducive learning environment. Despite these obstacles, teachers' willingness and creativity to help children with SEN are notable. The study also found that teachers are open to learning and want to participate in more workshops and courses designed to assist children with SEN.

Concerning the four hypotheses stated in this paper, the third hypothesis, EFL teachers implement different teaching methods to teach EFL to children with autism, is to some degree contested. Namely, teachers tend to use the same methods for the whole class and adjust them for the student with autism. Additionally, teachers feel unprepared to teach in an inclusive environment and require more support. EFL teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia face the same challenges and complexities. Both countries are

relatively underdeveloped regarding inclusion and funding needed for education. Finally, most EFL teachers collaborate with parents and professionals. Still, in terms of professionals, schools lack them, and sometimes teachers, although willing to collaborate with professionals, can't, due to their busy schedules. Teachers have suggested several options to improve the quality of their teaching. One of them is a collaboration with special schools or even a multi-track approach which entails children with SEN alter between special and mainstream classes.

Although I agree that there should be a collaboration between special and mainstream schools, and that collaboration would be beneficial for everyone, I can't entirely agree with the multi-track approach. I have concerns about the impact it could have on children with autism, who often rely on established routines and structure for comfort and security. Changing classrooms, friends, schools, and habits on a daily or weekly basis could be disruptive and stressful for these students. Instead, I suggest exploring alternative solutions, such as participating in the workshop Face the Difficulties and Study with Me, which brings teachers from the same community together to discuss their challenges, milestones, victories, and progress offering help and support to struggling teachers.

Nevertheless, it is essential to point to the limitations of this study. Since only 12 teachers took part in the research, it is obvious that this paper cannot serve as a model on how to teach children with ASD or which strategies and methods to incorporate in teaching EFL to students with autism. However, the paper can serve as a reminder that more research should be done on the topic of teaching EFL to children with ASD.

Reflecting on my experience writing this paper, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to write about a topic so dear to my heart. From a young age, I was passionate about raising awareness about autism and advocated for the rights of marginalized children. I always found solace and comfort in the love and acceptance offered by Vladimir Nazor, Center for Upbringing, Rehabilitation and Education, Oaza association and SOS Children's Villages. As previously mentioned, my older brother attended a special school and from that experience, I developed sensitivity and commitment to children with SEN. The pure love that I felt from these children was something I never forgot, and I finally had a chance to pay tribute to those who inspired me the most by writing this paper.

However, during the writing process, I encountered several difficult truths. I've realized that not all teachers share the same enthusiasm to work with children with SEN, and more importantly, I've learned to accept that. It was hard to deal with the fact that inclusion is a slow and challenging process in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Nonetheless, I found an inexhaustible source of inspiration in teachers dedicated to helping children with SEN and making an impact.

None of this would be possible without my mentor, Professor Larisa, whose encouragement and support led me to apply for my first Erasmus exchange. This experience, which allowed me to gain first-hand experience working with children with SEN in Spain and Serbia, was life changing.

Finally, through the process of writing this paper, I became aware of the level of responsibility that the teaching profession carries when it comes to helping children with autism. Therefore, the journey through the literature on this type of problem in education led me to learn about the theoretical principles of this phenomenon and the practical solutions that research can offer. I firmly believe that teachers are agents of change capable of molding their students into compassionate and kind adults. Although the process is slow, I will continue to be committed to making a difference in the lives of children with SEN.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Section 1.

1. Gender?
2. Which country are you from?
3. Years of experience teaching English?
4. Years of experience teaching EFL to a child with autism?
5. During your education, have you had any courses related to teaching a child with autism?
6. If the answer is yes, please describe what type of courses you had and whether they were useful once you started teaching a child with autism?
7. Have you had any professional development activities related to working with a child with autism?
8. If the answer is yes, please briefly describe what kind of professional development activities you had and how they contributed to your teaching a child with autism.
9. Have you tried to independently learn more about children with autism and the best ways to work with them?
10. If the answer is yes, please briefly explain how and what were the most effective teaching methods in your experience?

Section 2.

1. What teaching strategies do you apply to teach listening, reading, writing, and speaking in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students, or do they need to be different?
2. What teaching strategies do you apply to teach vocabulary in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students, or do they need to be different?
3. What teaching strategies do you apply to teach grammar in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students, or do they need to be different?

4. What teaching strategies do you apply to teach communication in English to a child with autism? Are the strategies the same as for other students, or do they need to be different?

5. From your experience, do children with autism prefer working individually, in pair work, or group work?

6. Do you apply any learning theories when teaching EFL to a child with autism?

7. If the answer is yes, please describe which learning theories do you apply.

8. Do you apply any teaching methods when teaching EFL to a child with autism?

9. If the answer is yes, please describe which teaching methods you apply and how?

10. How do you assess a child with autism? Please give an example

11. Do you collaborate with parents or other professionals?

12. If so, please describe in what ways does the collaboration with parents and professionals helps. What are the benefits of that cooperation?

13. In which aspect of the teaching English to the autistic child do you need professional development most?

The interview questions utilized in my master's thesis were derived from multiple sources, including Azad, Wolk, and Mandell's (2018) qualitative study involving teachers and parents of children with ASD. This study provided the framework for developing questions aimed at exploring collaboration between parents and teachers in inclusive classrooms and examining the significance of their relationship. Moreover, Savić and Prošić-Santovac's (2017) work was instrumental in inspiring questions regarding the need for additional professional support for teachers and evaluating their previous experience in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to students with ASD, as well as the importance of teaching assistants when working with children with special educational needs (SEN). Lastly, Gür and Yikmis's (2021) research paper guided my questions regarding teaching strategies and evaluation in classrooms with children with ASD and the significance of employing effective approaches to transform the way we approach teaching children with SEN. Taken together, the adapted interview questions are a culmination of these sources and were specifically designed to address the unique needs of this study.