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TEACHING ENGLISH ARTICLES

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem svou diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Olomouci dne   …………………………

vlastnoruční podpis

Content

THE THEORETICAL PART

INTRODUCTION

Even after studying articles for years, many non-native speakers of English find it challenging to use articles correctly before nouns. Every noun requires a decision about which article should be used before it. This decision is likely to have an important impact on the meaning of the noun. It is challenging for native speakers to decide which article *(a, an, the, zero article)* should be used. Non-native speakers have to constantly think about the article choice.

The correct use of articles in English is essential and at the same time very difficult for Czech learners as definiteness is not a category of Czech nouns. Fortunately, in most cases, omitting or incorrect use of an article will not cause communication misunderstanding. However, learners of English should be careful not to make unnecessary basic mistakes in sentences where the correct use of one of the articles is logical and clear.

In the submitted diploma thesis, I would like to focus on the areas which are most often affected by the mistakes made by students of the lower-secondary school. The main reason for choosing this topic was that as an English teacher, I regard articles to be an important part of English grammar since they identify nouns and therefore, they are frequent parts of utterances.

Regarding the structure, the thesis is divided into two parts. In the first one, the theoretical part, the overall grammar summary of articles is outlined. It introduces the position of articles in the grammatical system, the overview of correct usage of articles, teaching and practicing articles, and examples of most common mistakes in articles. The second part, the practical one, is devoted to testing students aged 11 to 15 years old attending grades 6th through 9th grades. Then, the data collected for the conducted research were evaluated. The results of our research are presented in the practical part of the thesis.

1 INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH ARTICLES

1.1 The position of articles in a grammatical system

In English, there are three types of articles: a/an, the, and zero article. Articles are grammatical words used to modify nouns. They define nouns as specific or unspecific (Porter, 2013, p. 4).

Articles stand at the beginning of a sentence element whose centre is a noun. Each article has its form which does not change. We distinguish among the definite article, the indefinite article, and the zero article. Articles belong to a semantic-grammatical category called the category of definiteness and they are classified as determiners (Dušková, 2012, p. 38). This group of determiners involves possessive determiners, such as *my, your, their,* etc*.,* demonstrative determiners, such as *this, that, these, those*, indefinite determiners, such as *some, any, no* and numbers (Dušková, 2012, p. 41).

1.1.1 Form and pronunciation of articles

Articles are usually unstressed and pronounced as weak forms[1]. The only form of the definite article in the English language is *the* (1), (2). This article evolved from the demonstrative pronouns *this* and *that* (Lester, 2013, p. 22).

Examples of the definite article:

1. She was probably *the* best player. (Lester, 2013, p. 22)
2. nothing of *the* kind (sort) (Dušková, 2012, p. 39)

There are two ways of pronunciation: *ðə* and *ði:*.The first way of pronunciation is used before words starting with a pronounced consonant (the computer). This means that in the written form, a word can start with a vowel. However, if we pronounce it with a consonant at the beginning of the letter (the university), we still use the first method of pronunciation. The second way of pronunciation is used before words starting with a pronounced vowel (the elephant), even if the first letter is a consonant (the honest person) (Scrivener, 2010, p. 51).

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[1] Weak forms are syllable sounds used when the word is not stressed (British Council, 2021).

Unlike the definite article, the indefinite article has two forms: *a/an* (3), (4). Both *a* and *an* evolved from the word *one* (Lester, 2013, p. 34).

Examples of the indefinite article:

3. three times *a* year (Porter, 2013, p. 7)
4. we were of *a* mind, of *an* age (Dušková, 2012, p. 39)

The indefinite article *a* is pronounced: *ə*. We use this article before a word starting with a pronounced consonant (a book, a university). The second form *an* pronounced as *[ən]* is used before a word that starts with a pronounced vowel (an actor, an hour) (Scrivener, 2010, p. 51).

1.2   Other determiners

It has been mentioned in the previous part of the submitted diploma degree thesis that articles are determiners along with possessive determiners, demonstrative determiners, indefinite determiners, and numbers (5), (6), (7), (8), (9) (Lester, 2013, p. 76). This diploma degree thesis is focused only on articles that have led the author of the thesis to the decision not to present other determiners in detail. Still, understanding their use and knowing their meaning can help to understand the function of articles in a particular context.

Determiners are functional words that are used to more closely specify a noun or to determine the quality or quantity of the noun phrase where they are placed (see chapter 1.1) (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 335). The name determiner comes from the English verb *determine* (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 353).

Examples of determiners:

5. *articles:* a, an, the (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 353)
6. *possessive determiners:* possessive adjectives - my, your, his / her / its, our, their; possessive pronouns - mine, yours, hers, ours, their (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 353)
7. *demonstrative determiners:* this, that, these, those(Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 354)
8. *indefinite determiners:* some, any, no, all, both, each, half, more, enough, etc. (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 354)

9. *numbers:* one, two, five, first, second, fifth, etc. (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 354)

1.3   The category of countability

For speakers and students, it is often difficult to decide whether an English noun needs an article before it and, if so, which one *(a/an/the)* to use. While choosing the correct article, the categories of countability and definiteness have to be considered. Countability means that the noun can make a plural form (Porter, 2013, p. 11).

Most nouns are countable. In the singular form, the indefinite article *(a/an)*can stand before them(10). This indefinite article has a similar meaning as the number *one*. Countable nouns can be paired with numbers (11) and with expressions such as *many, few,* and *a few* when expressing an indefinite quantity (Lester, 2013, p. 8).

Examples:

10. I'd prefer *a cat* to *a dog.* (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 336)
11. *two cats* (Hewings 2013, p. 100)

If we ask about the quantity of the countable noun, we ask *How many...?* in combination with the plural of the given countable noun (12) (Porter, 2013, p. 15).

Example:

12. *How many* questions could you answer? (Hewings 2013, p. 128)

Unlike countable nouns, uncountable nouns can take only the singular form and cannot be combined with the indefinite article. They stand only with definite (13) or zero articles (14). These nouns are often abstract (15), and occasionally, they have a collective meaning (mass nouns) (16) (Lester, 2013, p. 10).

Examples:

13. I want to eat *the food* you made yesterday. (Yule, 2006, p. 47)
14. *Football* is mainly a winter sport in Britain (Hewings 2013, p. 100)
15. *success, fear* (Hewings 2013, p. 100)
16. *furniture, hair* (Lester, 2013, p. 10).

When expressing an indefinite amount, nouns are paired with expressions *much*, *little*, and *a little* (17). For expressing a certain amount of the uncountable noun, we use expressions such as *a piece of, a bottle of, a glass of, a bar of, a cup of, a great deal of,…* (18) (Lester, 2013, p. 11). When asking about the quantity of uncountable nouns, we ask *How much…?* (19) (Porter, 2013, p. 19).

Examples:

17. *much* money (Yule, 2006, p. 47)
18. I have *a great deal of* respect for my supervisor because she's very honest and supportive. (Yule, 2006, p. 47)
19. *How much* will it cost?? (Hewings 2013, p. 128)

In English, some nouns can be countable in one context and uncountable in another (20), (21). Nouns of the same form thus have a different meaning. The uncountable form usually refers to a general idea or substance, and the countable form usually refers to a specific item (Hewings 2013, p. 100).

Examples:

20. The church is built of *stone*. (stone as a material = uncountable)
    He threw *a stone* at our dog. (one stone = countable) (Dušková, 2012, p. 25)
21. Would you like some *chicken*? (a kind of meat = uncountable)
    We have ten cows and fifteen *chickens* on our farm. (chicken as an animal = countable) (Dušková, 2012, p. 28)

In comparison with the Czech language, there are a few differences in the English language in terms of countability and uncountability. In English, *information, advice, homework, knowledge, luggage, etc.* are uncountable while in the Czech language, the nouns of the same meaning are countable; they take singular verbs. To distinguish between the countability and uncountability of these nouns, it is necessary to pay attention to their contextual meaning (Dušková, 2012, p. 29).

1.4   The function of articles

The function of articles is dependent on nouns as they affect their meaning. They determine whether nouns are general or specific in their reference (Dušková, 2012, p. 40). A detailed explanation of these types of references follows.

1.4.1 The articles in generic reference

As proposed in the introduction to this subchapter, there are two types of references. This part outlines the usage of articles while expressing *generic references*. If we speak about something in general, the reference is called generic. It means that a noun phrase describes a class as a whole and not a particular thing or person (Dušková, 2012, p. 42). The noun has the meaning *all of it/them*. This type of reference often occurs in general claims used for the introduction or summarization of ideas. It is also less frequent than the specific one (Yule, 2006, p. 50).

If we want to express *generic reference*, all three types of articles can be used:

- zero article is used with countable nouns in the plural – this usage for generic reference is the most common (22)

- the definite article the is used with countable nouns in the singular (these nouns can refer to humans, animals, plants, etc.) (23)

- the indefinite article a / an is used with countable nouns in the singular (24)

- zero article can be also used with uncountable nouns (25)

  (Yule, 2006, p. 50)

Examples:

22. *Rats* terrify me. (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 336)
23. *The monkey* climbs the tree. (Yule, 2006, p. 51)
24. *A sonnet* is described as a short lyric poem. (Yule, 2006, p. 51)
25. I bought *milk* and *rice* at the store. (Yule, 2006, p. 52)

For this type of reference, the distinction between definite and indefinite articles and plural and singular forms of nouns is irrelevant, hence there is little difference in meaning. There is often very little difference in meaning regarding the generic contexts. Contrary to a specific reference, articles in generic reference cannot be replaced with other words: *one* cannot replace *a/an* (Dušková, 2012, p. 43).

1.4.2 The articles in specific reference

The second type of reference is a *specific reference,* which is used when we refer to particular items. Both articles (definite and indefinite) can be used. When we use an indefinite article, it is called an *indefinite reference* and the usage of a definite article is called a *definite reference* (Dušková, 2012, p. 44).

In a case where both the reader and the writer do not know the specific identification of the given noun or this noun is general, we refer about the *indefinite reference*. The noun in indefinite reference has the meaning *one/some of many* (Yule, 2006, p. 51).

A/an is therefore typically used there:

- with singular countable nouns (26)

- special cases related to expressions of quantity (27)

    (Yule, 2006, p. 51)

Examples:

26. I buy *a ticket.* (indefinite article indicates that the referent is a part of larger identity) (Yule, 2006, p. 52)
27. *a piece* of cake*, a section* of land (Yule, 2006, p. 52)

We speak about *definite references* when definite articles are used. *The* is used before a noun to indicate that the identity of the noun is known to both the reader and the writer. All common nouns (countable and uncountable, singular and plural) can be connected with *the* for this type of reference (Dušková, 2012, p. 46).

We use this definite article when a noun:

- is unique, we know exactly what is mentioned (28)

- involves a superlative adjective in a noun phrase (the next, the only, the first, etc.) (29)

- is a part of a whole group (30)

- it has already been mentioned in the text, the identity of a noun has already been specified (31)

    (Yule, 2006, p. 52)

Examples:

28. *The moon i*s very bright tonight. (Yule, 2006, p. 53)

29. He is *the finest young player* around at the moment. (Hewings, 2013, p. 92)

30. The pages of the book were not cut.(= all pages) (Dušková, 2012, p. 47)

31. I ate *an* apple yesterday. *The* apple was juicy and delicious. (Yule, 2006, p. 53)

2 SET OF RULES FOR USING ARTICLES

From the author's point of view, understanding and using English articles correctly is not often very easy for English learners at elementary schools, so teachers face a difficult task in explaining this grammatical category of nouns. It is something that does not exist in the Czech language (there is no Czech equivalent for the articles), so students cannot compare articles with something which they would be familiar with. This can be one of the reasons why this part of English grammar is not very popular with most students.

Students get to know functions of articles and other determiners gradually in particular grades, over and over again in different contexts. The individual elements of the category of definiteness occur in all levels of learning, from the elementary one to the advanced one. It often occurs that students forget to use the articles during English lessons, or they do not use them on purpose because they simply do not know how. However, they need to realize that even though articles are only short words, they can completely change the meaning of an utterance. When people communicate, using articles correctly helps them to clarify the situation and things they are talking about.

We can simply determine which article should be used with a noun by answering the three following questions: Is the noun countable or uncountable? Is it singular or plural? Is it definite or indefinite? If the noun is definite, it always takes the article *the*; if it is indefinite, it never takes the article *the* (Lester, 2013, p. 4).

Whether articles are popular among students or not, mastering them is considered to be the basic element of the English language. The following subchapter of this chapter offers an overview of how English articles are used. There are also clarified all irregularities associated with English articles are clarified as well.

2.1 The indefinite article

The first element from the article system which elementary school students meet with is an indefinite article. The proper usage follows several rules. The indefinite article is used:

- before countable nouns in the singular when talking about a thing which is new, unknown, or introduced for the first time (32) (Lester, 2013, p. 34):

Example:

32. Sydney is *a* beautiful city. (Hewings, 2013, p. 114)

- when talking about a thing (or person) in general, not about a specific one (33) (Lester, 2008, p. 38):

Example:

33. You look like you need *a* friend. (Lester, 2013, p. 38)

- while naming an individual or representative of its kind where the group consists of individuals and what is applied to one, is applied to all of the group (34) (Yule, 2008, p. 35):

Example:

34. *A dog* is an animal. (= all dogs) (Yule, 2006, p. 54)

- when we name a profession (always after a verb *to be*) (35), or in case, we sort nouns into a specific group of individuals (36) (Lester, 2013, p. 39):

Examples:

35. His wife is *a doctor* at our clinic. (Lester, 2013, p. 39)
36. *A widow* pursues her dream of becoming a singer. (Lester, 2013, p. 40)

- when expressing quantitative connections (37) (Yule, 2006, p. 57):

Example:

37. Tom needs to wrap *a few* presents. (Lester, 2013, p. 95)

- the indefinite article is also used when it has a meaning of *one* in numerical and quantitative expressions (38), (39), and when expressing frequencies (40) (Yule, 2006, p. 57):

Examples:

38. *a /one* pound   (Yule, 2006, p. 58)

39. It will take *a / one* month (Yule, 2006, p. 58)

40. four times *a day* (Yule, 2006, p. 58)

- last but not least, we use the indefinite article in exclamation sentences beginning with *what a* and followed by a countable noun in a phrase (41), (42) (Yule, 2006, p. 59):

Examples:

41. *What a pity!* (Yule, 2006, p. 59)

42. *What a beautiful day!* (Yule, 2006, p. 60)

2.2   The definite article

The next element from the article system is a definite article. This article is the most common word used in the English language. Its correct usage is followed by certain rules too. We use this article in connection with nouns that:

- we have already known, e.g. from a context or a previous situation, so that this noun has been mentioned at least once before and then it is mentioned again for the second time, the third time, etc. (43) (Yule, 2006, p. 64):

Example:

43. I just got a new camera. *The camera* has an image stabilization feature. (Lester, 2013, p. 29)

- indicate people or things that cannot be replaced in a given context, the nouns are described in detail and specified closer by a phrase or by a sentence (44), (45), (46) (Lester, 2013, p. 97):

Examples:

44. *The letters* which she sent us were very pleasant. (Yule, 2006, p. 64)

45. He loved *the dessert* with chocolate and cherries. (Yule, 2006, p. 64)

46. *The stamps* are kept at the receptionist's desk. (Lester, 2013, p. 29)

- indicate beings or things that are unique (47) (Yule, 2006, p. 65):

Example:

47. *the sun*, *the public*, *etc.* (Yule, 2006, p. 65)

- were formed from adjectives and name a nationality or ethnic group (48), (49) (Yule, 2006, p. 65):

Examples:

48. I like *the French*.(Yule, 2006, p. 65)
49. The English are famous for being very polite. (Grammaring, 2020)

- are countable in the singular and name a typical representative of the whole class (the whole group of the same individuals) (50) (Yule, 2006, p. 66):

Example:

50. *The tiger* is a huge animal. (Yule, 2006, p. 66)

- a typical example when we use this article is before ordinal numbers (51), the third degree of adjectives (superlative forms) (52), and other ordering expressions, such as *the next, the last, the previous, the following* (53) (Yule, 2006, p. 67):

Examples:

51. This is *the first* time I've ridden a horse. (Grammaring, 2020)
52. Jill is *the most* intelligent girl in the class. (Grammaring, 2020)
53. Don't forget *the following* rule. (Yule, 2006, p. 68)

- in the case of official job titles, *the* is usually used if there is only one such example at any given time (54) (Porter, 2013, p. 8):

Example:

54. *the Prime Minister* of Canada (Porter, 2013, p. 8)

2.3 The zero article

The third element is zero article. This type is used in situations when there is no article preceding the noun, although the reason for not using any article has its meaning. Do not use the article:

- before developed countable nouns in the plural which refer to unknown, new things (55), these words are connected with an indefinite article in the singular, and when they are not developed, we often use *some* before them and in questions and negative sentences *any* (56) (Porter, 2013, p. 10):

Examples:

55. We are using *a new method*. → We are using *new methods*. (Porter, 2013, p. 10)
56. There is *a magazine* on the shelf. → There are *some magazines* on the shelf. (Porter, 2013, p. 10)

- in a situation when countable nouns are in the plural and indicate a group (a kind) (57), (Porter, 2013, p. 11):

Example:

57. *Women* generally live longer than men. (Porter, 2013, p. 11)

- in connection with uncountable nouns, especially abstract nouns (58) and nouns which represent the food (59) (Lester, 2013, p. 62):

Examples:

58. I like listening to *music*. (Porter, 2013, p. 13)
59. *Oil* and *water* don't mix. (Lester, 2013, p. 62)

- we use zero articles in combination with school subjects (60); games and sports (61), with the names of days of the week, holidays, and seasons (62); with nouns

following the prepositions *at*, *to,* and *in* (63), and with nouns following the preposition *by* with the names of the means of transport (64). The article is not used with names of the days and night times, especially with prepositions *at, by, after,* and *before* (65); with the names of meals in a day, if we mean a meal in general (66) (a specific meal is combined with a definite article) and in various expressions (67) (Porter, 2013, p. 14-15):

Examples:

60. Her favourite subject is *Math*. (Porter, 2013, p. 14)
61. He played *tennis*. (Porter, 2013, p. 13)
62. *Monday, Tuesday,…*

    Christmas

    Every mile is two *in winter*. (Porter, 2013, p. 14)
63. to be *at home* (Porter, 2013, p. 14)
64. to go *by bus*

    to travel *by plane* (Porter, 2013, p. 14)
65. *at midnight*

    before midnight (Porter, 2013, p. 14)
66. *after breakfast*

    Our flight was early so we had time *for dinner* on the way from the airport. (Porter, 2013, p. 14)
67. from time to time
    face to face
    The students seemed to grow younger *year by year.* (Porter, 2013, p. 15)

- the rule of the proper usage of articles with the names of illnesses is a little bit complicated, with some of them we do not use any article (68), while with others we use the definite one (69) (Porter, 2013, p. 15):

Examples:

68. *malaria, cancer, etc.* (Porter, 2013, p. 15)
69. *the flu, the measles, etc.* (Dušková, 2012, p. 79)

2.4   Articles with proper nouns

Special cases in the usage of articles are proper nouns that give names to people, places, or things. Proper nouns are written with a capital letter at the beginning and they may consist of one or more words, working together as a single unit. This group of nouns includes e.g. geographical names, names of institutions and public facilities, or the names of people (70) (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 350).

With this group, we can use the definite article, the indefinite article, and the zero article – it all depends on specific examples (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 350).

Example:

70. Princess Diana, etc. (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 350)

- First of all, we use *the* with proper nouns in the plural (71). Proper nouns in the singular use articles infrequently (72) (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 352).

Examples:

71. the Andes, the Himalayas, the Chicago Bulls (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 352)
72. Coffman Memorial Union (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 352)

- Regarding the names of countries, regions, and cities we do not use articles (73), but there are some exceptions when given names are combined with the definite article (74). The definite article always occurs in names of countries in the plural and in names of countries which contain words such as *republic, union, kingdom, state* (75). There is no article with names of places, streets, and squares (76) and with names of universities (77) (Dušková, 2012, p. 77). Although, when a name of a university consists of this form: *university + of + name*, we have to add the definite article (78) (Dušková, 2012, p. 78).

Examples:

73. Brasil, London (Dušková, 2012, p. 77)
74. the Hague (Dušková, 2012, p. 77)
75. the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom (Dušková, 2012, p. 77)

76. Broad Street, Hyde Park (Dušková, 2012, p. 77)

77. Harvard University (Dušková, 2012, p. 77)

78. the University of London (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

- We do not use the article before the names of mountains, peaks, and hills (79). But the definite article always occurs with these proper names in the plural (as mentioned above) (80). When we name islands whose names are in the singular form, the article is not used (81). However, with islands in the plural form, we always use the definite article (82). Deserts are always preceded by the definite article (83). Nouns that refer to any type of water (i.e. oceans, seas, rivers, straits, etc.) stand always with the definite article (84). The exceptions are lakes, there is no article with their names (85) (Dušková, 2012, p. 78).

Examples:

79. Mount Everest, Popocatepetl (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

80. the Alps, the Himalayas (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

81. Sardinia (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

82. the Canary Islands (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

83. the Kalahari Desert (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

84. the Pacific Ocean, the Thames (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

85. Lake Victoria, *Lake Baikal* (Dušková, 2012, p. 78)

- Names and surnames of people are usually without article, even if they are preceded by the title prefixing a person's name (Mr, Mrs, Ms) (86). Albeit, in some cases, we can use the indefinite article with the names of people. One of them is a situation in which the speaker does not know the person or is not sure of his identity (87) (Dušková, 2012, p. 80). The definite article is used with a proper name if the reference is not clear without an additional phrase (88) (Grammaring, 2020). *The* is used with plural family names to refer to the family as a group (89) (Yule, 2006, p. 68).

Examples:

86. Hello, my name is *Catherine*.

Monet was a French painter.

Mr. Blake was a gentleman, he knew how to behave. (Dušková, 2012, p. 80)

87. *A Mr. Smith* was looking for you this morning. (it is announced that someone whose name is *Mr. Smith* was looking for someone in the morning) (Dušková, 2012, p. 80)

88. No, I meant *the Mr. Brown* from Australia. (Grammaring, 2020)

89. My brother lives next to *the Jacksons*. (Yule, 2006, p. 68).

- Names of continents usually take the zero article (90) (Dušková, 2012, p. 77).

Examples:

90. *Europe, North America* (Dušková, 2012, p. 77)

2.5 Variability in choice of articles

The kind of determination we use in a sentence is mostly clearly determined by the given content, situation, or context. However, there are also some cases where the correct use of the article is not clear; it varies according to the subjective point of view of the speaker. An example can be the phrase *looking at it from the technical point of view.* This phrase suggests that there is only one technical aspect (there can also be the economic aspect, the aesthetic aspect, etc.). In contrast, when we use the indefinite article in the same phrase (*looking at it from a technical point of view)* means that there can be several technical aspects (Dušková, 2012, p. 72).

Other cases where the proper use of an article may vary are nouns that can be countable in one sense and uncountable in another one. A typical example can be the word *silence* in two sentences: *There was a short silence* (in Czech: Chvíli bylo ticho). *There was absolute silence* (in Czech: Bylo tu naprosté ticho) (Dušková, 2012, p. 73).

Proper use of articles may also vary in some phrases, for example: *at this time of (the) year*, *in (the) summer*, *take (a) pride in something*, etc. (Dušková, 2012, p. 73).

3 ARTICLES AS A PART OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

3.1 Approaches to teaching grammar

Thornbury (1999, p. 1) defines grammar as *"a description of the rules that govern how a language's sentences are formed."*

It is an important part of language teaching which studies the forms (i.e. text, sentence, word, and sound) that language takes (Thornbury (1999, p. 1). It is not possible to separate it from vocabulary; they should be used and taught together because they both create a language which is correct and understandable for the learners (Harmer, 2012, p. 12).

Grammar tries to explain why some sentence structures are possible to be formed (91) and some not (92) (Harmer, 2012, p. 13).

Examples:

91. Correct: *The dog* eats popcorn. (sentence pattern: subject + verb + object) (EnglishSentences, 2021)
92. Incorrect: Eats popcorn *the dog*. (sentence pattern: verb + object + subject) (EnglishSentences, 2021)

There are two main concepts of grammar teaching: *covert* and *overt*. *Covert grammar teaching* is based on hiding grammatical facts from students studying a foreign language. Attention is given to exercises and texts, not to grammar. Grammar is hence presented to students gradually (93) (Thornbury, 1999, p. 23).

Example:

Students do some activities in which new grammar is presented. The main attention is given to the activity, not to the grammar:

93. In the classroom, students join in pairs and they practice dialogues according to the previous example of the teacher:
    Student 1 (giving a pen to his classmate): "Sarah, can you pass me *the blue pen*?"
    Student 2: "Yes, here is *the blue pen*…"

Thanks to this speaking activity, students realize that they have to use a definite article when talking about specific things. They can see these specific things at that moment; they know which things they are talking about (ESL Library, 2021).

Overt grammar teaching presents grammatical rules and explanations to students openly; the rules are not hidden from them (94) (Thornbury, 1999, p. 23).

Example:

A teacher provides students with the grammatical rule of using the indefinite article:

94. Teacher: "We use an indefinite article with general nouns.
    E.g. I am hungry. I want *a sandwich…*"

Then the teacher continues with additional information that she does not have a specific sandwich in her mind. Students do not know which sandwich she is talking about. It could be any sandwich. That is why it is a sandwich (ESL Library, 2021).

3.2   Types of exercises for practicing the articles

From the author's viewpoint, teachers should devote more time to articles and their practice in lessons because this is a very difficult part of English grammar and it is very important. Teachers most often use the textbook as a tool for teaching articles. But teachers should use other sources for this purpose to get some inspiration on how to teach this part of grammar and how to practice it. These sources may consist of exercises or tests for students. Teachers can use these exercises in their own lessons. Some teachers can create their own materials for practicing but due to the level of difficulty, this is not that often.

There are two particular exercises and activities which are used in English lessons – *controlled practice* and *free practice exercises*. The first mentioned type of exercise is designed for practicing a new language in a limited form, it requires a particular answer. It can be a gap-fill worksheet, a crossword puzzle, a word search, etc. While *free practice exercise* involves activities which allow the students to practice the language freely, usually involving the use of language learnt previously. This type of exercise includes role play, class debates, class surveys, etc. (TESOL Glossary, 2021).

There are several *controlled exercises* for practicing the articles in the classroom. Some examples follow:

A typical activity for practicing the articles is *the humble gap-fill text* (95) where students have to fill in the missing articles *a, an, the,* and *zero article*. Students can complete it either individually or in pairs (Scrivener, 2010, p. 46).

Example:

95. Once upon ___ time, there was ___ tailor. He lived with his wife and five children in ___ village of Swaffham. ___ tailor and his wife worked hard, but they never had enough money. They lived in ___ small cottage. In ___ garden, there was ___ big, old oak tree. ___ tailor often sat under ___ tree…. (Project 3, 2008, p. 48)

Scrivener (2010, p. 46) writes that another exercise which can be used for practicing the articles is *text reordering* (96). This exercise contains several mixed-up sentences that students have to rearrange in a meaningful way. They can work individually or in pairs. The purpose of this activity is *"to focus on the use of articles to shape a conversation or text"*. In this activity, teachers can point out the importance of articles given by the fact that they create the logic of the story.

Example:

96. a) I had an accident this morning in the kitchen.
    b) Suddenly, I dropped the book on the floor.
    c) And the egg went all over my trousers.
    d) I was eating an egg and reading a book.
    e) When I picked up the book I knocked the food off the table.
    (Scrivener, 2010, p. 47)

Articles can be practiced through *dialogues* (97) between people. This activity aims to focus on the correct usage of articles when introducing new information or referring to an already known one. In this activity, students have to fill each gap with the correct article (Scrivener, 2010, p. 47).

Example:

97. Person 1: Excuse me. Is there ___ café near here, please?

Person 2: ___ nearest café is near ___ bus station. Go straight down here until you see ___ railway bridge. ___ café is just in front of ___ bridge. It's next to ___ newsagent's.

Person 1: Thank you. (Project 3, 2008, p. 54)

There could be a slight change in this type of exercise – it should be focused on a set of words (e.g. a lion, the lion, lions) and students fill in the correct word in the dialogue. For further practicing, the author recommends engaging in other dialogues with other sets of words given by teachers (Scrivener, 2010, p. 47).

The author also suggests teachers can practice the articles via *various sentences* where students are required to choose the correct article, e.g. from two or more options (98). This type of exercise involves various rules to get the general awareness of the most frequent mistakes in articles.

Example:

98. Australia is *the / a* sixth largest country in the world.

The capital is *the / -*Canberra. (Project 4, 2009, p. 64)

A/ - hurricane is formed over the ocean. (Project 4, 2009, p. 65)

Another exercise can be *a coherent text containing mistakes in articles* (99). Students have to find these mistakes and correct them. It tests students' knowledge of the correct usage of the articles.

Example:

99. One day a antelope and a monkey were walking along.

"I feel tired," said a monkey. "All this walking is wearing me out. It's the easier for you. You've got a long legs. Mine are very short."

"If you climb on the my back, I'll carry you," said the antelope…. (Project 4, 2009, p. 68)

The last presented example is called *Articles Practice*. It is a classic definite and indefinite articles worksheet. This worksheet is ideal for 7th to 9th graders for further

practicing or reviewing articles. It looks like this: In the worksheet there are 12 sentences and each student gets a copy of it. Then they work alone, they have to complete sentences with a, an, the, or zero article. When they finish it, the teacher with the whole class says the correct answers and each student scores a point for the correct answer. The winner is the one who receives the highest points for the activity. This activity develops reading and writing skills and it takes about 20 minutes.

Furthermore, Scrivener (2010, p. 51) states that if teachers wish to create their own exercises, they can unwittingly put in questions that are problematic to answer or to explain.

Articles are at the same time necessary from the beginner level and also have truly advanced-level complexities. He advises that if teachers of students and students of lower levels are not sure of their linguistic skills, articles are one language area where they may do best to use published sources of exercises.

3.3   Practicing the articles through language skills

When learning and practicing grammar it is important to include all language skills, such as *listening, speaking, reading,* and *writing*. They belong to free practice exercises and are very important for complete communication. Speaking and writing belong to the category called *productive skills* – language production. Listening and reading represent the category known as *receptive skills* – learners just receive and understand the language. These two categories of skills naturally support each other - the development of reading can support the development of writing, e.g. some activities (such as both literature and project work) can contribute to building both skills categories (Thornbury, 1999, p. 135).

The most effective way to practice the articles is through *reading*. Reading skills enable students to build their vocabulary on a diverse range of topics, they improve their fluency and understand how sentences are built and how ideas are connected within and between sentences. This skill helps the students build vocabulary and to understand the language better. It is not necessary to understand every single word but to get the main idea of the reading activity. It is important to choose texts that are at a convenient level for readers – not too easy, not too difficult. In reading activities, learners should know the main rules covering the use of articles and not stop and think about every article they observe in a sentence (Scrivener, 2011, p. 266).

Articles should be also practiced through *listening comprehension exercises*. It is a very important communication skill which is often considered by learners as the most difficult one. It helps learners to improve their pronunciation, including pronunciation of articles. If the learners understand the words they listen to, listening can help them to master the usage of the articles correctly and quickly. If they cannot listen effectively, messages can be misunderstood and then the communication breaks down (Scrivener, 2011, p. 249-250).

Articles are also practiced in speaking activities. Through some dialogues, discussions, etc. Students practice the correct use of articles and if necessary, teachers should correct mistakes immediately. But with *writing*, they both serve teachers more as an outcome of learning and understanding the articles. They show the learners' knowledge of using the articles (in writing even more than in speaking) (Scrivener, 2011, p. 235).

3.4   Examples of other activities focused on articles

With the framework of a rule-given approach, articles should be taught through some activities, e.g. games. These activities attempt to shift the centre of attention from teachers to students to give them more responsibility for their learning and provide more opportunities for real communications, even if the topic of this conversation is grammar (Thornbury, 1999, p. 41).

It is based on the belief that students can also teach each other. Students learn the language and get communicative practice at the same time. The role of teachers is limited; they just serve as supervisors and help students to solve problems during the activity. In the end, they summarize the results, repeat the grammar with the class, etc. (Thornbury, 1999, p. 43).

Here are two examples of activities for practicing the articles:

The first activity is called "*Articles Race*". As the name suggests, students race when completing a set of sentences with the correct articles. Students are divided into pairs and each of them gets a worksheet with 10 sentences. Each student has different sentences in his or her worksheet (Student A and Student B). Then students take turns reading a sentence aloud to their classmate. Student A starts with reading. He uses the word "gap" for the two missing articles in each sentence. Student B tries to fill in the correct article a,

an, the, or zero article. If the answer of student B is correct, they move to another sentence in the worksheet on the next turn. If one or both answers are incorrect, they stay on the first sentence and the turn is on student B and his reading. Then student A continues by explaining how many articles were wrong in the first sentence. This activity ends after about 20 minutes with the first student who gets to the finish. It is intended for 8th or 9th graders and it involves all four teaching skills (TeachThis, 2021).

The second activity with the name *Once upon a time…* takes the whole lesson (45 minutes) and it is based on writing stories with articles and noun cards. Each group of three gets a set of cards with nouns and articles. Firstly, they have to think about what type of story they want to write (e.g. science fiction, a love story, etc.). Then, they line up the cards to make a story and start with writing. The task is to use as many cards as possible. They are also advised to use adjectives to make the story more descriptive. After finishing the story writing, one group make pairs with another group and they read their stories to each other. Both groups have to give feedback, correct mistakes and pay special attention to the use of articles. Finally, students read their story to the whole class and the teacher gives each group points for the quality of storylines, the number of cards used, the correct usage of articles, grammar, and adjectives. This activity is more advanced; it is suitable for 8th or 9th graders. It is focused mainly on reading and writing skills and it can also be used to practice adjectives and narrative sentences (TeachThis, 2021).

3.5   Teaching the articles based on thematic plans and Textbooks

The author thinks that teaching the articles is one of the biggest challenges teachers have to face in their teaching. As it has been mentioned above, Czech students find English articles very difficult to use correctly because we do not have them in our language. But at the same time, they are also one of the most frequently used words in English, so the possibility for non-native speakers to make mistakes with them is nearly unlimited.

Students should meet with the grammatical category of definiteness at every learning stage, from the elementary to the advanced one. They learn individual functions of articles and other determiners gradually and in various contexts. Articles as a new subject matter should be introduced to learners deductively or inductively. The deductive approach means that teachers explain the rules and then the learners do exercises (Thornbury, 1999, p. 29). On the other hand, articles should be taught inductively – the learners receive the

exercise and then they try to discover the rules regarding it (Thornbury, 1999, p. 49). When choosing the suitable approach, it always depends on the composition of the class and the current situation.

There are some ways for explaining the articles. The author thinks the most effective method of explaining them is an oral explanation. Teachers can also use some diagrams or pictures or students can read the study material themselves. For the further practice of articles, gap-fill exercises or some reading / listening materials which contain articles can be used. However, it always depends on the type of learner when selecting the right methods for teaching and practicing the articles.

At our school, we use textbooks *Happy Street 1* and *2, Bloggers 1, Projects 1 - 4*. They have a number of short exercises concerning articles. Some are focused on the use of articles directly; others deal with another grammatical category, e.g. category of countability where the articles are also important. These exercises are important; their purpose is to practice this grammar in further detail and to show how students understand it. It is the way for students to make sure that they can apply what they have learned.

Teaching articles based on our school textbooks and thematic plans which are created for each grade is going to be presented in the following parts of the thesis. These plans involve integrating curriculum ideas around topics (they are prepared in accordance with the School Educational Programme, which was created in accordance with the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education).

At our school, we begin with the English language in the *third grade* with the textbooks *Happy Street 1* and *Happy Street 2* in the *fourth grade*. At this beginner level, grammar teaching is likely to be covert since the main aim is to get students to use language as much as possible. The exercises in these textbooks are not directly aimed at articles and there is no theory dealing with them. Therefore, the level of awareness and practice is up to the teacher. Students in the *third grade* start with the written form of English and they only learn that articles are connected with nouns. The indefinite article *a* is the first article students get across with. They learn that there is "something" before a noun (a countable noun) or other words which describe or specify a noun (100). It is often connected with the topic "School" because it comes first. This topic is presented in unit two. It is the first time they hear the indefinite article from teachers, so they start using it,

too. The second form they get across with is *an w*hen they learn new words starting with vowels. In our textbooks *an* is introduced in unit four which is called "At the shop" (101).

Examples:

100. *a* pencil (Happy Street 1, 2009, p. 8)

101. *an* ice cream (Happy Street 1, 2009, p. 24)

When they learn some adjectives, they start to combine them with nouns. It is important to focus on the correct word order, but maybe it comes naturally after some time. They know the adjectives stand before the nouns but the indefinite articles have to stand before adjectives (102). The first combination of an adjective and a noun comes in unit three with the title At Happy House. Students learn the names of toys in this unit.

Example:

102. *a red* doll (Happy Street 1, 2009, p. 19)

Soon students learn how to make plural – by adding –s or –es to the nouns (or how to create plural forms of irregular nouns). At the same time, teachers explain that there is no indefinite article before plural nouns. But not so much emphasis is placed on it yet, as it is emphasized a year later. What is more important in this grade is the phrase *there is* which is mentioned in unit six for the first time. They learn that this phrase is followed by indefinite article *a* or *an* and nouns in singular forms (103). Later, they start to use also *there are* with plural nouns and with zero articles. Even though this part of English grammar is practiced many times (when describing a picture with buildings or places, a classroom, etc.), students forget to use it because it has no lexical meaning. Nevertheless, it should be used for the sentence to be grammatically correct.

Example:

103. *There is a table* under the bunk bed. (Happy Street 1, 2009, p. 45)

In the *fourth grade*, the indefinite pronouns *some* and *any* are introduced to students in unit three. They start to use them with the verb have got/has got and with the names of food. They make simple affirmative sentences using *some* (104). And they also learn how to make simple questions and negative sentences using *any* (105). In this grade, the focus

is more on the correct usage of articles with the plural nouns – there cannot be any indefinite article before these nouns (106). For younger students, it is better to say "it is without the article" than to explain that the article exists there too, but it is called the zero article. Soon, students can talk about how they go to school in unit five, so they start to use the preposition *by* with the noun in combination with the zero article (107). There are of course other expressions consisting of *go/travel* followed by *by* and *means of transport* (go by car, travel by plane, etc.) Later on, they also learn some occupations which are combined with the indefinite article in unit seven (108).

Examples:

104.   He's got *some bananas*. (Happy Street 2, 2009, p. 17)
105.   He hasn't got *any* oranges.(Happy Street 2, 2009, p. 17)
106.   *Chickens* are small and fast. (Happy Street 2, 2009, p. 28)
107.   I go to school *by bike*. (Happy Street 2, 2009, p. 34)
108.   Jill is *an astronaut*. (Happy Street 2, 2009, p. 50)

Students generally meet the basic rules of the definite article after mastering the basic rules of using the indefinite article. This happens in the *fifth grade*. Students have already met this article, e.g. from the speaking of their teachers, in studying textbooks, listening comprehension exercises, etc. But they have only been advised the definite article is used, but the attention was not given to this grammar at that time. In this grade, our school uses the textbook *Bloggers 1*. This book starts with some fixed phrases in contexts in unit zero (109) and ordinal numbers are introduced to them. Firstly, they practice numbers with questions such as "What is today's date?" or "When is your birthday?" (110). Students find it quite difficult to answer this question because they have to remember that in the spoken form, they have to use the definite article *the* before the number and preposition *of*. Later, they learn that nationalities are combined with the zero article (111) in unit one, but they have to remember there are some exceptions regarding that. In this grade, the definite article and basic rules of its usage are presented to students with its basic rules in unit two (112). They meet it in many contexts and discuss it in greater detail. Soon, they learn more about countable and uncountable nouns starting with the questions "How much? How many?" when asking about food. And finally, they learn some chores containing the definite article in unit four (113).

Examples:

109. *Have a nice day*. (Bloggers 1, 2018, p. 11)

110. My birthday is on *12ᵗʰ April*.

111. I am *Chinese*. (Bloggers 1, 2018, p. 26)

112. …We have got a cool car. Pin loves *the car* and I love it too. (Bloggers 1, 2018, p. 42)

113. I have to *take out the trash*. (Bloggers 1, 2018, p. 80)

From the *sixth* to *ninth grades* we use *Projects 1, 2, 3,* and *4* in English lessons. Most students are at the pre-intermediate level and grammar teaching is more overt. Bigger emphasis is given to correct usage of articles. Generally, the most common exercises in *Projects* are *the humble gap-fill text* or *exercises* where students have to *circle the correct form from two or more options*. The *sixth grade* is focused mainly on repeating already known rules through exercises. These exercises are not directly aimed at using the articles, but students practice them through completing exercises concerning articles in almost every unit. The exercises which concern the articles are in almost every unit. There are in total 32 exercises concerning the articles in the textbook and the workbook. In the first unit, the attention is given to plurals and the correct use of articles - when we put the cardinal number before a noun, there is then no article (114). Students repeat names of days, months, seasons, and holidays; they practice names of states, their inhabitants, and capital cities with zero article in unit two (115). Indefinite pronouns *some* and *any* used with countable and uncountable nouns are emphasized - with the help of repeated practicing. The pronoun *no* used in negative sentences is later added to this group. Due to the fact that this pronoun carries the negative meaning itself and there can be only one negative in an English sentence, the verb of the relevant sentence is therefore always positive. This information may be new for students. Students practice additional phrases or parts of days with given prepositions and articles in unit four (116).

Examples:

114. *a dog, two dogs* (Project 1, 2008, p. 10)

115. Paris is *in France*. (Project 1, 2008, p. 16)

116. *in the morning, at noon, at quarter past six* (Project 1, 2008, p. 41)

The grammar dealing with using the articles is presented openly in the *seventh grade*, particularly in units four and five. The title of the fourth unit is "Food" and students learn more about countable and uncountable nouns – what they mean, what articles are used with them, etc. They repeat how to use *some* and *any*, how to use questions *How much…?* and *How many…?* (117), and the words *a few* and *a little* express small amount (118). It is the first time when they start to use the term zero article. They have already seen this article in use before, but they were not taught it is called zero article. The fifth unit deals with comparative and superlative forms where students learn there has to be a definite article before the adjectives in the superlative form (119). In this textbook and workbook, there are about 50 exercises which are directly focused on articles which concern them. There is also a grammar reference in the workbook where most important rules for each lesson are explained. Articles are explained in parts of unit four and five.

Examples:

117.   *How much bread* do we need?

How many tomatoes do we need? (Project 2, 2008, p. 49)

118.   You need *a few apples*.

You need *a little water*. (Project 2, 2008, p. 51)

119.   *The largest city* in the USA is New York. (Project 2, 2008, p. 64)

Among the most important rules of using articles that have to be mastered in the *eighth grade*, is how to use articles with names of places. Through a trip to London in unit four, they learn that zero article is used for most street names, squares, parks or bridges (120) and that definite article occurs before names of rivers, seas, oceans, cinemas and theatres (121). Afterwards, there is an overview of how to use definite and indefinite articles correctly, with practicing them in context (e.g. in a story, in dialogues, when asking directions) (122). There are about 60 exercises which are focused on articles or which concern articles in the textbook and workbook. Correct usage of articles with place names is explained in grammar overview – part four.

Examples:

120.   It's in the middle of *Trafalgar square*. (Project 3, 2008, p. 44)

121.   I took this photo on Westminster Bridge over *the River Thames*. (Project 3, 2008, p. 44)

122.   Once upon a time, there was *a tailor*. *The tailor* and his wife worked hard, but they never had enough money… (Project 3, 2008, p. 48)

In the *ninth grade,* all types of articles are learned and practiced in a combination with abstract nouns or some examples of illnesses (in the topic of medical treatment), or through the culture and history of English-speaking countries in unit five (123). The number of exercises dealing with articles is about 55 (involving the textbook and the workbook).

Example:

123.   …At first, Australia was used as a prison. Criminals from Britain were sent there. (Project 4, 2008, p. 64)

4   MISTAKES IN ENGLISH ARTICLES

The way to mastering a foreign language is accompanied by mistakes. Therefore, we should not look at mistakes as something what is wrong, but as a part of the process of foreign language learning (Choděra, 2001, p. 157). Mistakes cannot be avoided in any school subject and therefore not in the linguistic one (Choděra, 2001, p. 113).

Everyone has his or her own methods of learning a foreign language. It is, at the same time, true that everyone is afraid of making mistakes. It is undeniable that the biggest mistake is the fear of mistakes. We should realize that we all make mistakes, they are a part of our life and we should learn how to benefit from them. They move us further; forcing us to push our boundaries to where we initially thought we could never go (Korčáková, 2005, p. 43). The other fact is that the more mistakes we make, the more we learn. Every mistake warns us what to avoid next time. And if we can eliminate mistakes in these ways, our progress in learning will be huge (Korčáková, 2005, p. 45).

4.1   What is a language mistake?

A mistake is understood to be a deviation from a prescribed performance standard, an inappropriate choice of means of expression. In other words, a mistake is everything incorrect or inappropriate. Mistakes provide teachers with information on the effectiveness of their teaching methods or they can point to his lack of methodological experience. They serve teachers and students as an indicator of what needs to be practiced and repeated more (Bartram, Walton, 1991, p. 20-21).

For students themselves, it is necessary to make mistakes because in their making we can see the way the student perceives learning. It is the way a student examines his hypotheses about the nature of the language he is learning (Korčáková, 2005, p. 50). Students must always have the feeling that everything written in the textbook or uttered by the teacher is guaranteed to be correct, reliable, and suitable for imitation (Choděra, 2001, p. 37).

Choděra (2001, p. 113-114) points out that we can divide mistakes according to their *seriousness* and we distinguish between big mistakes and small ones. Big mistakes are related to a thoroughly discussed subject matter, while small mistakes are considered to be a subject matter that has been discussed only briefly. Mistakes can be further divided

according to their *causes* (this can be e.g. inattention, ignorance or fatigue) and finally according to their *language status*. From this point of view, mistakes can be grammatical, spelling, lexical or phonetic ones.

In the English language, it is important to understand the distinction between *mistake* and *error*. These two terms both indicate a language mistake, but there is a difference in their meanings. *A mistake* is referred to a performance error in which the learner knows the system but fails to use it correctly. On the other hand, *an error* refers to a learner's lack of proper language knowledge; the learner does not know the correct way, his system is incorrect. That is why mistakes can be self-corrected with or without the help of the teacher and errors cannot be self-corrected because they are not recognizable by the learner (Bartram, Walton, 1991, p. 113).

The importance of mistakes in the process of learning was justified in previous paragraph. They are evidence of learning and they cannot be eliminated from the learning process. It is suitable when students are not afraid of making mistakes and are not verbally punished for it. They could realize that making mistakes is something humans do and that they learn from them (Bartram, Walton, 1991, p. 13-14).

4.1.1 Sources of mistakes

When correcting mistakes, it is very useful to recognize their source and possible cause. After that, it is possible to focus on a specific source and based on this knowledge to work with the mistake which has been made (Korčáková, 2005, p. 71).

From the general point of view, mistakes have several sources and they can be made by both students and teachers. For example, when the teacher focuses too much on the accuracy of the speech and corrects every mistake that occurs, then there is a lack of space for students themselves and their creativity and effort. Then there is no need for students to correct and mistakes occur in following lessons again and again. The opposite situation is when the teacher ignores or hardly ever corrects mistakes and it can be claimed that he or she give essentially no value to correction. And if there is no feedback from the teacher, students continue to make mistakes. When learning difficult parts of grammar, teachers should practice them a lot. They should focus on practicing as much as possible to get new information into students' memories (Bartram, Walton, 1991, p. 26-27).

Interlingual transfer (where a mother tongue influences the process of learning and using a foreign language) has also a significant influence on making mistakes. As for articles, students make many mistakes in them. It is mainly because they cannot compare them with something in their native language, the articles do not exist in their native language as there are no articles in their language (Korčáková, 2005, p. 74).

Many incorrect sentences can occur due to so-called performance failures, which include fatigue, slip of the tongue, illness, etc. This is usually promptly corrected by other speakers in the classroom. On the other hand, some mistakes cannot be considered a mere failure of speech or a consequence of fatigue, etc. These mistakes usually hinder students for a longer time. They are caused by wrong generalization, incomplete application of rules, etc. (Korčáková, 2005, p. 75).

4.2   Common mistakes in the use of articles

From the author's point of view, understanding and using the articles correctly is one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar for students to grasp. Many students do not know how to use the articles properly, they do not understand them which leads to making mistakes in their usage. And, in the worst case, they prefer to omit them, both in written and oral forms because they simply do not know how to use them. It is also a big mistake.

The first example of a common mistake is where plural nouns are used with the indefinite article (124). Students often forget the basic rule that an indefinite article cannot be combined with the plural form of a noun. These nouns can take only definite or zero articles (Lester, 2013, p. 65).

Example:

124.   Incorrect: I have *a books* in my bag.

Correct: I have *books* in my bag.(Lester, 2013, p. 65)

Another example is when both an article and an adjective modify a noun. Then the word order is *article + adjective + noun*. We have to use the indefinite article according to the first sound of the adjective that immediately follows (125). It is wrong to use an indefinite article if there is an adjective in front of a plural noun (126) (Hewings, 2013, p.

93). Common mistakes made by students are words such as *honour*, *honest, etc*. Students know that we use *a* with words beginning with consonants and *an* with words beginning with vowels. However, in the case of these nouns, the first sounds are not pronounced, e.g. the word *honest* begins with a vowel sound. That is why we use *an* with it (127). This rule is also applied to acronyms and initialisms (128) (Scrivener, 2010, p. 50).

Examples:

125.   Incorrect: My mother is *a honest* woman.

        Correct: My mother is *an honest* woman. (Hewings, 2013, p. 94)

126.   Incorrect: *a* HR department, *an UK-based* company

        Correct: *an* HR department, *a UK-based* company (Hewings, 2013, p. 94)

127.   Incorrect: It's *an beautiful* animal.

        Correct: It's *a beautiful* animal. (Hewings, 2013, p. 93)

128.   Incorrect: When he is in public, he does *an embarrassing things*.

        Correct: When he is in public, he does *embarrassing things*. (Hewings, 2013, p. 94)

When we use uncountable nouns in sentences, we must not use indefinite articles because they are combined only with countable nouns in the singular; e.g. *some* is used instead (129). On the other hand, if we want to make uncountable noun countable, we have to use a quantifier before these nouns (such as a bottle of, a bar of, a cup of, a loaf of, etc.) and a quantifier is used with the indefinite article (130). Several examples are presented for illustration below (Hewings, 2013, p. 96).

Examples:

129.   Incorrect: Please give me *a water*.

        Correct: Please give me *some water*. (Hewings, 2013, p. 96)

130.   Please give me *a bottle of water*. (Hewings, 2013, p. 96)

Articles should not be used with possessive adjectives. Students are often confused and they do not know whether they have to use articles and possessive adjectives at the same time. These adjectives can help them to identify whether the reference is specific or unspecific (131) (Hewings, 2013, p. 94).

Example:

131.   Incorrect: Why are you reading *the my* book?

Correct: Why are you reading *the* book?

Correct: Why are you reading *my* book? (Hewings, 2013, p. 94)

When students want to refer to abstract ideas, they also make many mistakes. They do not realize that articles are omitted before these certain nouns and they use them incorrectly. Zero articles are implied in these cases (132) (Lester, 2013, p. 62).

Example:

132.   Incorrect: *The health* is one of the most important things in *the life*.

Correct: *Health* is one of the most important things in *life*. (Lester, 2013, p. 62)

As mentioned above, mistakes carry feedback information, i.e. a learning factor. Students require feedback, they want to know about mistakes why make and then they learn from them. Responsible guidance by teachers is necessary; they have to be prepared to work with mistakes. It is necessary to create methods of working with mistakes constructively so that they lead to further development of a foreign language (Choděra 2001, p. 115).

4.3   Correcting mistakes and types of corrections

Throughout their school studies, students will make many mistakes. A lack of any mistakes is indicative of a curriculum that is insufficiently challenging. Teachers have to choose that kind of material which is challenging but manageable for their classes. It is important to correct mistakes and support students at the same time (Korčáková, 2005, p. 66). It is important to correct mistakes mainly in controlled practice exercises which are an integral part of the lesson and they strengthen the knowledge of students of individual language parts. Contrary to this, free practice activities allow students to experiment with the language and it is necessary to correct every single mistake.

4.3.1 Self-correction

In case of making mistakes in the usage of articles and other grammatical structures, their further elimination and subsequent correction are very important. The most optimal way of correction is *self-correction.* An ideal situation is when the student realizes a mistake which was made and fixes it automatically. Unfortunately, it is not always the case. A teacher should thus point out the mistake made in controlled exercises, e.g. asking questions about the incorrect sentence (133). At this moment, a student has time to think about why his or her response was incorrect and can correct himself. It is important to give a student a little time to identify for recognizing the given mistake and for the subsequent correction (Bartram, Walton, 1991, p. 83).

Example:

One student in the class is speaking about his favourite city:

133.   Student: Incorrect sentence: "*The Paris* is *big city.*"

Teacher: "*The Paris* is *big city.*"?

Student: Correct sentence: "Paris is a big city." (Free English Learning Resources, 2021)

4.3.2 Peer correction

Sometimes a student is unable to self-correct, so *peer correction* can be appropriate. It is a classroom management technique where students correct each other without the teacher's help (134). It shifts the focus away from the student whose answer is not correct and it involves the whole class at that moment. It also allows the teacher to check the overall knowledge of articles of the class (Bartram, Walton, 1991, p. 83). Peer correction often creates a positive class atmosphere, which makes it easier for students to feel less intimidated when others help in the class (British Council, 2021).

Example:

Peer correction can be managed in a classroom in different ways, e.g. students are in pairs and they read and correct each other's work:

134.   Student 1: "She works *in pub….* She is *fastest runner…."*

Student 2: "She works *in a pub*…. She is *the fastest runner*…."(Free English Learning Resources, 2021)

4.3.3 Teacher correction

The most common method used in the classroom is probably *teacher correction.* It occurs when individual students, as well as the whole class, do not know the correct answer. The teacher helps the class by identifying mistakes and giving them accurate corrections supported by explanations and examples (135). Unfortunately, this method is overused in the classroom and it makes it difficult for students to take responsibility for their learning and noticing their mistakes. It can lead to students' loss of interest and motivation (Bartram, Walton, 1991, p. 29).

It is very important not only to correct every single mistake made by students (in free practice exercises) but to appreciate and to praise when the language is used correctly. It keeps students stay positive about learning English (Korčáková, 2005, p. 75).

Example:

135.   Student: "She's famous *actress*. She's the one who was in "Four Wedding…"

Teacher: "She's *a* famous *actress*. She's the one who was in "Four Wedding…" (Carter, McCarthy, 2006, p. 349)

Teacher: "We use the indefinite article, when we name professions, e.g.my mum is a doctor, he works as a teacher, etc."

All teachers should have various methods for how to correct students' mistakes since different strategies are required with different students. One of these methods can be prompting students with facial expressions or phrases which they associate with being incorrect. It is essential to avoid negative responses to mistakes, such as *incorrect, no, wrong*. They affect students' confidence in the classroom (Korčáková, 2005, p. 74).

Although articles can seem insignificant, they have a very important function in a sentence. They were developed for easier communication in a given language and their wrong usage changes the meaning of the message. It is clear that the usage of articles may be a little bit complicated for beginners; therefore it is better to learn a few basic rules for

the beginning and keep them in mind. For advanced speakers, the use of articles has an irreplaceable function in English. There are many rules for using the articles which learners of English have to observe. There are also many exceptions to these rules and special cases in which different rules have to be followed. But once students familiarize themselves with these rules and exceptions, they will start to use articles correctly. After continuous use, they will start to sound natural to them and using them incorrectly will "sound strange".

THE PRACTICAL PART

5   INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

The main aim of this thesis was to find out which areas – concerning the practical usage of the indefinite and definite articles – are most often affected by mistakes made by students of the lower-secondary school students. Generally speaking, the rules concerning articles *a, an, the,* or– *(a zero article)* are rather complicated for Czech students at elementary schools. The usage of articles is not natural for Czech learners and the rules connected to the usage of each of the articles may seem complicated for the learners. Thus, this thesis aims to point out which areas of the article usage are easier to master and which are not.

The target groups were the students at the lower-secondary school. The research was conducted in a time of distance learning in the form of a test. The test consisted of 3 parts and it was sent to students via MS Teams, our online teaching tool (therefore, students are used to working with it). The test was accessible to students for 14 days - from 18th January to 31st January 2021.

The test was completed by 186 students. Out of the total number of respondents, 82 were girls and 104 were boys. The test was sent to students from the 6th to 9th grade, so students were of 11 to 15 years of age. Other age categories were not represented in the research sample. In the 6th grade, there were 55 students, in the 7h grade there were 51 students, in the 8th grade 43 students completed the test and in the 9th grade, 37 students completed it. As for research methods, the test as a tool for quantitative research was used to find out the information.

The source of obtaining information in the research part was the above-mentioned test. Students submitted the test anonymously, the author only wanted to know which class each students attends. The test was divided into three parts, each comprised of one exercise dealing with articles. Exercise 1 was a dialogue between two people in which students had to fill in the gaps using definite, indefinite or zero article according to grammatical rules. There were 26 gaps. Exercise 2 consisted of 12 sentences. Students' task was to choose the correct article from two options to complete the sentences. They had to choose between definite and zero article. The last exercise was a text with the title "My life". Students had

to find mistakes in the article usage and correct them. The text contained a total of 16 mistakes. The whole test is attached in the appendix of the submitted thesis.

The test included various grammatical rules to get general awareness of most frequent mistakes in articles made by students at our lower-secondary school. The test was created based on our school curriculum in the school educational programme. Our school textbooks and thematic plans also helped me to compile the test.

Four research hypotheses were established:

H1: Students of the 6th grade have not mastered the usage of definite and indefinite articles in the same way as students of the 9th grade.

H2: Students at the lower-secondary school frequently omit articles "a, an, and the" in their written language.

H3: Students make fewer mistakes in indefinite articles "a, an".

H4: Students make the most mistakes in the correction of mistakes because it is the most difficult type of exercise.

The main research problem was focused on the correct and incorrect usage of definite and indefinite articles by students at the lower-secondary school. The data about the ratio of the students´ failure in the practical usage of articles were processed, analyzed, and summarized to clarify the whole issue. Hypotheses were either confirmed or rejected.

The results of the research will be evaluated according to the number of points that could be obtained in each exercise. The total numbers of respondents will be converted into percentage and clearly shown and presented in the form of graphs.

The number of learners per each class varies. For instance, 80% of 55 learners are more students than e.g. 80% of 37 – each percentage will be followed by two numbers in brackets. The first one represents the number of learners to whom the current statistic applies; the second one represents the whole sample. This number equals to 100%.

The research was conducted at Čerčany elementary school, where the author of the thesis teaches. The school is situated in the Central Bohemian region, in the district of Benešov, about 15 kilometres from the city of Benešov. This school provides education

from the 1st to the 9th grade. The school belongs to the category of large schools. In terms of the number of students, its capacity is 520 students. The school complex consists of 3 pavilions and it is located in the centre of the town. The town has good transport accessibility. Besides English, other languages taught at the school are German, Russian and French.

5.1 Results in general

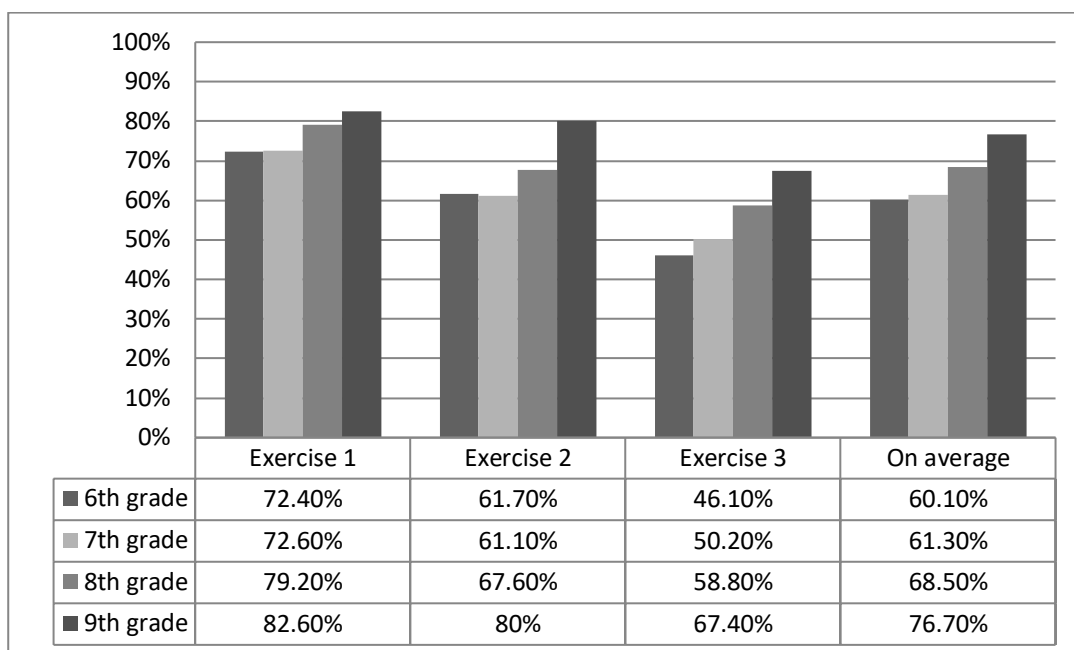|	Exercise 1	Exercise 2	Exercise 3	On average
■ 6th grade	72.40%	61.70%	46.10%	60.10%
■ 7th grade	72.60%	61.10%	50.20%	61.30%
■ 8th grade	79.20%	67.60%	58.80%	68.50%
■ 9th grade	82.60%	80%	67.40%	76.70%

Figure 1: Success rates of students – comparing all grades at the lower-secondary school

Figure 1 shows the lower-secondary students' test results. It compares their success rates at dealing with articles in all three exercises the test comprised of.

Exercise 1 was a dialogue between two people. Students were asked to complete a definite, an indefinite, or a zero article into 26 gaps. The 6th graders could receive a total of 1,430 points (26 gaps x 55 students) but they completed this exercise 1 for a total of 1,035 points with a success rate of 72,4%. The 7th graders could receive 1,326 points (26 gaps x 51 students) and they were assessed for 963 points. Their success rate was 72,6%. In the 8th grade, the maximum number of points was 1,118 (26 gaps x 43 students). The class achieved 886 points, in other words, Their success rate was then 79,2%. The 9th graders could get 962 points (26 gaps x 37 students). An entire class received 795 points, so their success rate was 82,6%.

The analysis of exercise 2 led to the conclusion that older students achieved higher success. This exercise had twelve sentences where students have to choose the correct article from two options - they had to circle the definite or zero article. The 6th graders could get a total of 660 points (12 gaps x 55 students), the 7th graders 612 points (12 gaps x 51 students), the 8th graders 516 points (12 gaps x 43 students), and the 9th graders 444 points (12 gaps x 37 students). After adding the total number of points, the 6th graders completed the exercise for just 407 points, so their success rate was 61,7%. Surprisingly, the 7th grade turned out slightly worse than the 6th grade receiving just 374 points. Their success rate thus was 61,1%. The 8th grades gained a total of 349 points. Their success rate was then 67,6%. And finally, the 9th graders received 355 points, so their success rate was 80%.

Exercise 3 was actually a coherent text with 16 hidden mistakes made in the use of articles. Students had to find these mistakes and correct them. The total numbers of points that could be reached by students as maximum were as follows: 880 points for the 6th grades, 816 points for the 7th grades, 688 points for the 8th grades, and 592 points for the 9th grades. The 6th graders had less than half the correct answers when they received only 406 points. Their success rate was 46,1%. The results of the 7th graders were quite similar to the 6th graders – they got only 410 points, so they had only 50,2% correct answers. The results with 8th graders were slightly better than in the previous grades. They got 405 points and their success rate did then 58,8%. The 9th grades had the highest number of correct answers by receiving 399 points. They achieved a success rate of 67,4%.

On average, the 6th graders completed these exercises for 60,1%. The 7th graders' average success rate was 61,3%. The total points of the 8th grades represent the success rate of 68,5%. And the 9th graders answered correctly in 76,7% of all sentences in exercises 1, 2 and 3.

The test results proved that the older students passed the test better than the younger ones, but it can be said the difference among the results of all grades was not so great. Exercise 1 seems to cause fewer problems to students as they performed the best in it. Contrary to this the results of exercise 3 show that this exercise was the most difficult one among all three exercises. The results were the worst there.

5.2 Comparison of the results of the 6th and the 9th grades

H1: Students of the 6th grade have not mastered the usage of the definite and indefinite articles in the same way as students of the 9th grade.

Firstly, the test results of the 6th and the 9th grade were analyzed to be able to compare students' ability to use the articles. I chose these two grades they are three years apart and this age difference seems to be convenient enough for comparison. The aim was to show the real difference between two grades and to decide whether three years of studying English are sufficient for measurably better knowledge of article usage or not. Generally, the hypothesis was based on the assumption that students of the 6th grade have not mastered the usage of definite and indefinite articles in the same way as students of the 9th grade. The hypothesis is anticipated to prove that the 6th grades make more mistakes that the 9th grades.

In this part, the first two exercises from the test will be analyzed; the third one will be discussed with the hypothesis 4.
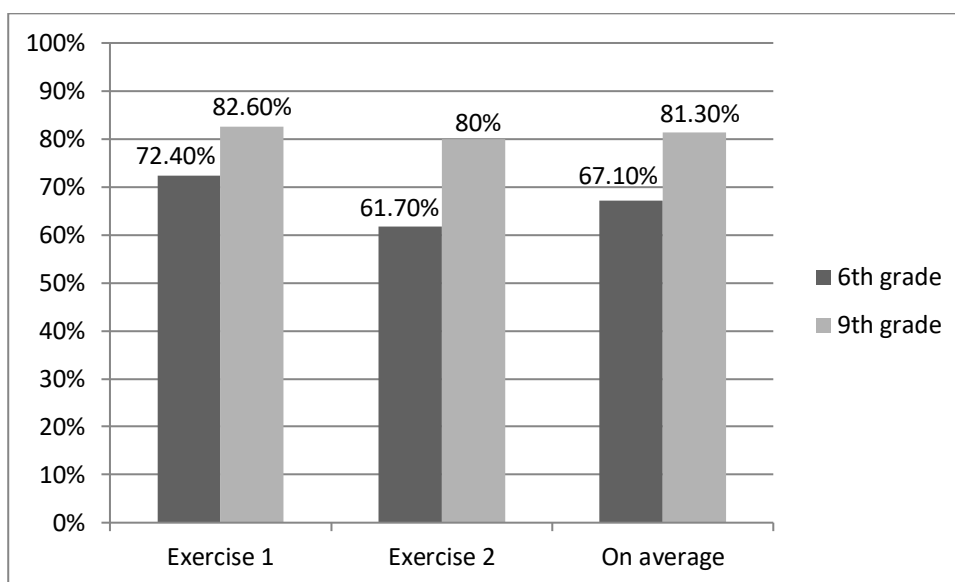
5.2.1 Test results – exercises 1 and 2

Figure 2: Success rate of students – comparing the 6th and the 9th graders

Figure 2 shows the results from exercises 1 and 2, it compares the students' success rate at dealing with articles. In the first exercise, the 6th graders could receive a total 1,430 points (26 gaps x 55 students) and the 9th graders could get 962 points (26 gaps x 37

students). Although there are different numbers of students attending each grade, it is clearly shown that the 9th graders were better than the 6th graders. A whole class of 9th graders received 795 points, so their success rate was 82,6%, whereas the 6th graders completed the first exercise for a total of 1035 points with a success rate of 72,4%.

Analyzing the second exercise, the older students' higher success is proved again. The 6th graders could get a total of 660 points (12 gaps x 55 students) and the 9th graders 444 points (12 gaps x 37 students). After adding up all points, the 9th graders received 355 points, so their success rate was 80%. The 6th graders completed the exercise for just 407 points, so their success rate was 61,7%.

On average, the 9th graders answered correctly in 81,3% of the sentences in exercises 1 and 2, while 6th graders completed these exercises only for 67,1%. Older students were more successful than younger students. Their answers were supposed to be better thanks to their longer English studies which means that they have mastered the grammar rules of article usage in a better way.
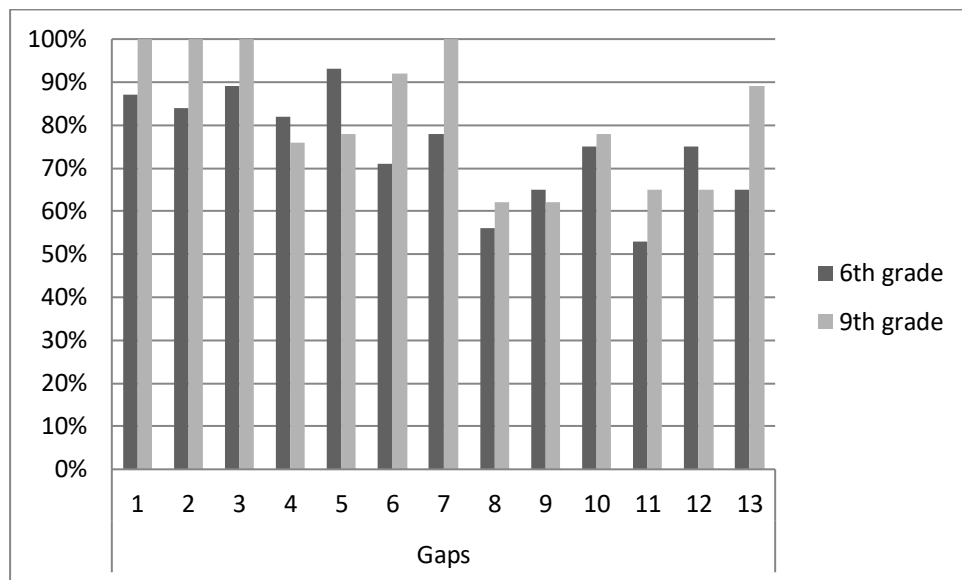
5.2.2 Exercise 1 – correct and incorrect sentences

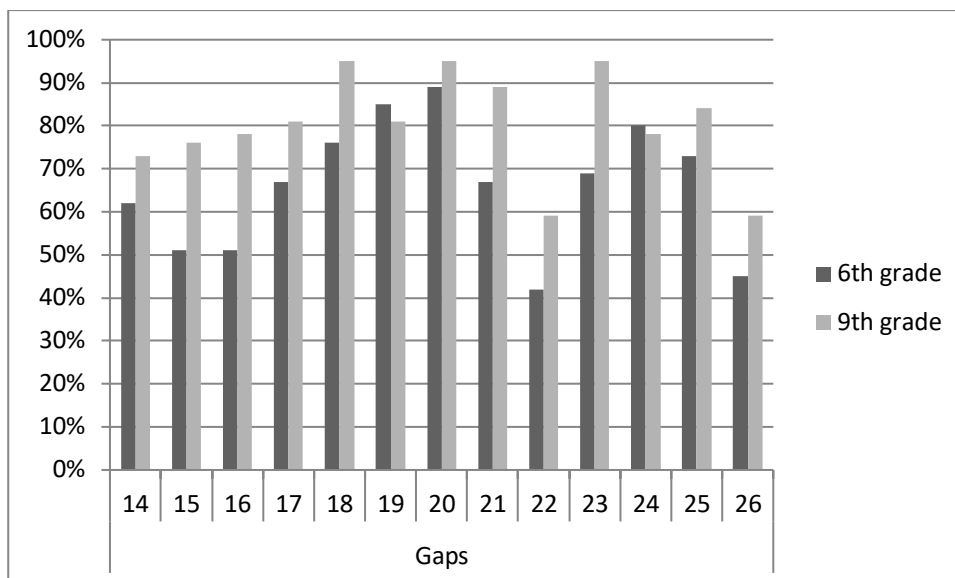***Figure 3:*** *Ex. 1, part 1 – comparison of correct sentences of the 6th and the 9th graders*

Figure 4: *Ex. 1, part 2 - comparison of correct sentences of the 6ᵗʰ and the 9ᵗʰ graders*

Figure 3 and Figure 4 provide facts for the 6ᵗʰ and the 9ᵗʰ grades' results' analysis in each sentence. It is divided into two parts (part 1, part 2) because of the space capacity.

Some sentences from exercise 1 were difficult for both the 6ᵗʰ and the 9ᵗʰ graders. The example sentences from a dialogue where the most mistakes occurred are the following:

Ryan: *Well, we are here, watching (8) __ **(the)** kangaroos. (9) __ **(The)** lion is next to (10) __ **(the)** kangaroo. (11) __ **(The)** elephant is behind (12) __ **(the)** lion.*

The most problematic gaps were gaps (8) and (11). Gap (8) presents a very challenging grammatical issue for learners. Only 56% (31/55) of the 6ᵗʰ graders and 62% (23/37) of the 9ᵗʰ graders answers correctly with *the* 29% (16/55) of the 6ᵗʰ graders and 16% (6/37) from the 9ᵗʰ grade answered *a*. 15% (8/55) of the 6ᵗʰ graders and 19% (7/37) of the 9ᵗʰ graders answered –*(zero)*. 3% (1/37) from the 9ᵗʰ grade answered *an*.

The other example of a mistake was gap (11). 53% (29/55) of the 6ᵗʰ graders and 65% (24/37) of the 9ᵗʰ graders answered *the*. The dominant incorrect answer was *an,* with 37% (20/55) of the 6ᵗʰ graders and 30% (11/37) of the students from the 9ᵗʰ grade. 5% (3/55) of the 6ᵗʰ graders and 5% (2/37) of the 8ᵗʰ graders answered incorrectly – *(zero)*. 5% (3/55) of learners from the 6ᵗʰ grade answered *a*.

The learners might have simply failed the whole dialogue and analyzed each sentence individually or they are not familiar with the difference between specific and general nouns.

The last part of the dialogue contains other example sentences with the most mistakes made and they were the gaps (22) and (26):

Sarah: Yes, I am. I enjoy it (19) __ (a) lot! Can you imagine going to (20) __ (the) zoo three times (21) __ (a) week? In (22) __ (-) Indiana, some kids do because their school is at (23) __ (the) zoo. I have (24) __ (a) friend there.

Ryan: Wow, really? What (25) __ (a) pity, it is not (26) __ (the) same here!

Gap (22) presented a real issue to both grades since they are not aware of the fact that the names of towns and countries usually take the zero article. 42% (23/55) students of the 6th grade and 59% (22/37) of the students from the 9th grade filled in the correct answer – *(zero)*. Nevertheless, 44% (24/55) and 25% (9/37) of learners answered *the*. The rest answered *a* or *an* - with 7% (4/55) of the 6th graders answering *a* and the same number answering *an* and 5% (2/37) and 11% (4/37) of the 9th graders answering *a* and *an*.

Gap (26) is a fixed phrase heard quite often in English by the students. Despite this fact, a lot of mistakes were made there. Specifically, 45% (25/55) of the 6th grade and 59% (22/37) filled in *the*. The highest occurrence of the incorrect answer was – *(zero)*. It was filled by 29% (16/55) of students from the 6th grade and 32% (12/37) from the 9th grade. From the 6th grade, 24% (13/55) answered *a* and 2% (1/55) *an,* while 5%(2/37) of the 9th graders answered *a* and 3% answered (1/37) *an*.

Gaps (15) and (16) were, quite unexpectedly, slightly problematic as well, especially for younger learners.

Sarah: Look at (13)__ (the) elephants! Do you know that they are (14) __ (the) largest land animals in the world? Also, the African elephant is (15) __ (-) bigger and (16) __ (-) taller than the Asian elephant.

Only 51% (28/55) of the learners answered – *(zero)* in the gap 15 - the same number as in the next gap (16).Other students (40%; 22/55) decided to complete *a* and 9%

(5/55) completed *the* into the gap (15). 29% (16/55) of the learners decided for *a*. Additionally, 20% (11/55) of the learners answered incorrectly *the*.

To summarize the results, the 6th graders filled no sentence correctly up to 100%, unlike the 9th graders who were 100% successful in sentences 1, 2, 3, and 7 which seemed to have caused no problem for them. Generally, their results were much better than the results of the 6th graders. The 6th graders were more successful only in sentences 4, 5, 9, 12, 19, and 24. The 9th graders did better in all other sentences. As regards the 6th graders, the best accuracy in their answers presented sentences 1, 3, 5, 19, and 20. The success rate of these sentences was higher than 85%. Therefore the hypothesis number 1 was confirmed.

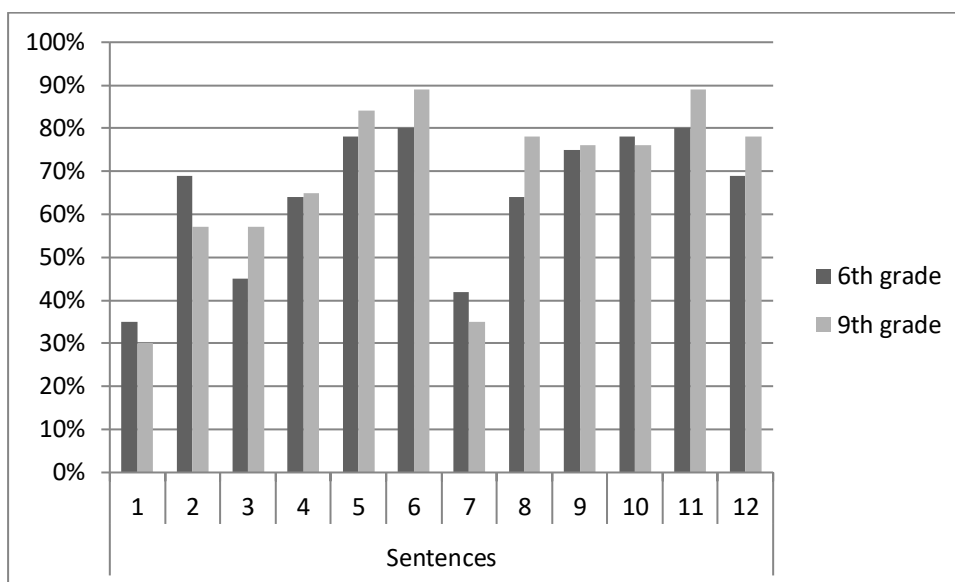### 5.2.3 Exercise 2 – correct and incorrect sentences

Figure 5: *Ex. 2 – comparison of correct sentences of the 6th and the 9th graders*

Figure 5 presents a comparison between the results of the 6th and the 9th grade in individual sentences. It shows that some sentences caused problems for both the 6th and the 9th graders - they made mistakes there.

The most problematic sentences for both grades were sentences 1, 3, and 7:

*1. Kids don't go to **school** on Saturday.*

This special phrase, which is used without an article, meaning attending an institution/being a member of that institution was one of the most challenging parts the

test. Only 35% (19/55) of learners from the 6th grade and 30% (11/37) of learners from the 9th grade circled the correct answer – *(a zero article)*. All remaining students from both grades circled the wrong answer *the*.

*3. Tokyo is in **Japan**.*

Up to 45% (25/55) of learners from the 6th grade answered – *(a zero article)* and 57% (21/37) of learners from the 9th grade answered – *(a zero article)*. All other students circled *the*, which was incorrect. Perhaps the learners remember a type of a rule that says that the names of places stand with *the,* or they deduced there is only one Japan and it is a specific place, and therefore there has to be a definite article.

*7. What is she watching on **TV**?*

This sentence also presented a lot of difficulty for the majority of the learners. Only 42% (23/55) of learners from the 6th grade answered – *(a zero article)* and 35% (13/37) of learners from the 9th grade circled – *(a zero article)*. Other students seemed to struggle with these sentences and selected *the*. It is not clear whether the learners know that TV is referred to as a general case or "on TV" just means to be broadcasted.

The 6th graders were more successful e.g. in sentence 2:

*2. My parents visited **the** USA last year.*

A strong 69% (38/55) of learners from the 6th grade and 57% (21/37) of learners from the 9th grade have chosen *the* correctly. The number of correct answers of the 6th graders is significantly higher compared to sentence 3. This was the same for the 9th graders.

On the other hand, the 9th graders had better results e.g. in sentence 8:

*8. Bill is **the** biggest in our class.*

This sentence might have been a slight challenge for the 6th graders because students are not taught about superlative forms until the 7th grade. 64% (35/55) of the 6th graders and 78% (29/37) of the 9th graders selected the correct option *the*. Other students selected – *(a zero article)*.

To summarize the results, the research has shown that neither the 6th grade nor the 9th grade was 100% successful in any sentence. It comes as no surprise that the students of the 9th grade were better than the students of the 6th grade. The 6th graders were more successful only in four sentences: 1, 2, 7 and 10. The 9thgraders performed better in all other sentences. Both grades were the most successful in sentences 5, 6, and 11. There, the success rate was higher than 77%.

5.3   Omitting the articles in written form

H2: Students at the lower-secondary school frequently omit articles "a, an, and the" in written form.

The second hypothesis will be either confirmed or rejected in the research to demonstrate if students of the lower-secondary school omit articles in their written language. Firstly, they are not aware of their correct usage. Secondly, it is a category of grammar not existing in the Czech language. In other words, Czech students do not have any other similar equivalent for comparison. As a result, articles are omitted.

In this part, the test results of the selected classes will be used for analysis and evaluated together. There will be the sentences from exercises 1 and 2, where one of the articles *a, an,* and *the* had to be filled in (exercise 1) or circled (exercise 2). The sentences from exercise 3 will not be used and discussed; they will be discussed later to confirm or to reject hypothesis 4.

The total number of students who either omitted or filled in an incorrect article in individual sentences will be converted to a percentage; being done separately for exercises 1 and 2.

5.3.1 Test results – exercise 1

It has been mentioned above the correct usage of articles *a, an,* or *the* in exercise 1 was analyzed 1. It concerned 19 gaps (from the total of 26) from exercise 1: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, and 26.
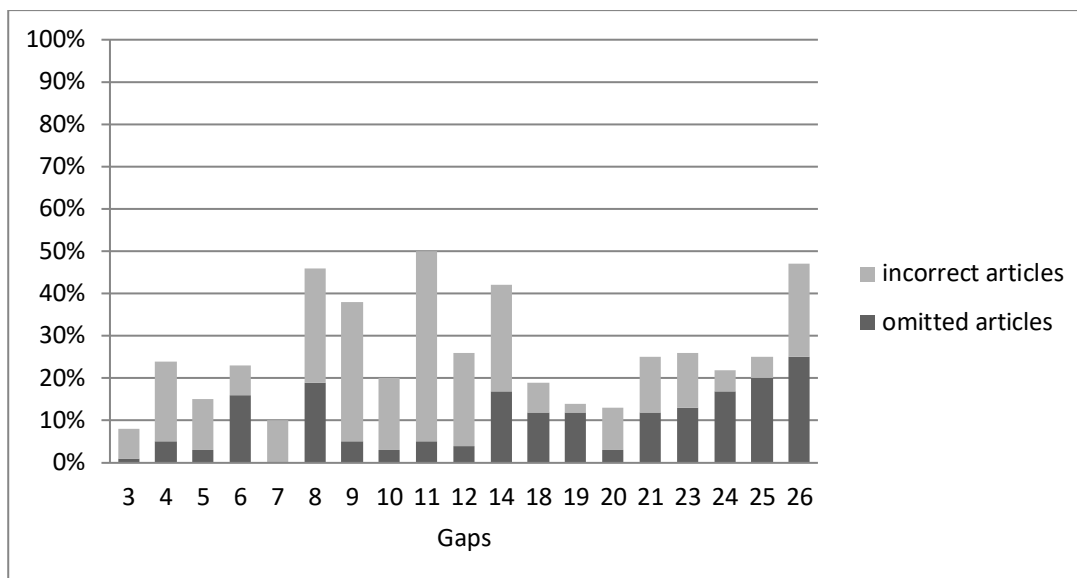
Figure 6: Ex. 1– the results of all grades – incorrect and omitted article

Figure 6 clearly shows the results of students at the lower-secondary school. It shows the ratio between omitting the article and using incorrect definite or indefinite article. The remaining percentage (up to 100%), consisting of correct sentences is not necessary to be dealt with in further analysis.

Some gaps in the test caused no particular problem for students and some did. The failure rate of the articles filled in these sentences either equaled to or was lower than 50%. The biggest number of mistakes was done in the following gaps:

Ryan: *Well, we are here, watching (8) __ (the) kangaroos. (9) __ (The) lion is next to (10) __ (the) kangaroo. (11) __ (The) elephant is behind (12) __ (the) lion.*

Sarah: Look at (13)__(the)elephants! Do you know that they are (14) __(the)largest land animals in the world?

Gaps (8), (11) and (26) presented the first major problem for some learners. 46% (86/186) of all learners completed the gap (8) incorrectly – 19% (35/186) of learners omitted the article, and 27% (51/186) used incorrect articles *a/an*. 54% (100/186) of learners completed the gap (8) with the correct article *the*.

There was the highest frequency of incorrect answers in gap (11) – a total of 50% (93/186) of learners. In particular, 5% (9/186) of learners omitted the article and 45% (84/186) filled an incorrect article in. The rest of the students answered correctly *the*.

*Ryan: Wow, really? What (25) __ (**a**) pity, it is not (26) __ (**the**) same here!*

Up to 42% (78/186) answered the superlative form of an adjective in the gap (14) incorrectly. The incorrect answers spread between 17% (31/186) of learners who omitted the article and 25% (47/186) of students who chose another incorrect indefinite article. The rest answered the correct article *the*.

Gap (26) represented another problem for almost half of the students. 47% (88/186) of them did not write the correct article. The number of students who answered incorrectly, as 25% (31/186) omitted the indefinite or definite article and 22% (47/186) selected another incorrect article. All remaining students filled the gap (26) in with the correct article *the*.

To summarize the results, the research has shown there was not a single sentence in exercise 1 with a success rate of 100%. Some sentences were easier for students, some were more challenging. All grades were the most successful in sentences 3, 5, 7, 19, and 20. The failure rates were either equal to or lower than 15%.

When analyzing the incorrect answers, the wrong usage of articles was higher in most cases than the amount of omitting the article. In other words, students filled in some definite or indefinite articles (although these articles were not correct) rather than they chose to omit their usage. The percentage of students using the zero articles compared to the percentage of students who filled in articles was higher only in sentences 6, 18, 19, 24, 25, and 26.

5.3.2 Test results – exercise 2

The evaluation of the second exercise was quite different from the evaluation of exercise 1 because there were only two options in exercise 2 – circling the definite article *the* or *zero articles*. Thus, only four sentences (out of 12) with the correct article *the* were analyzed. However, the option of circling the article *the* was not always chosen. These sentences were therefore incorrect. It concerned sentences 2, 6, 8, and 11.

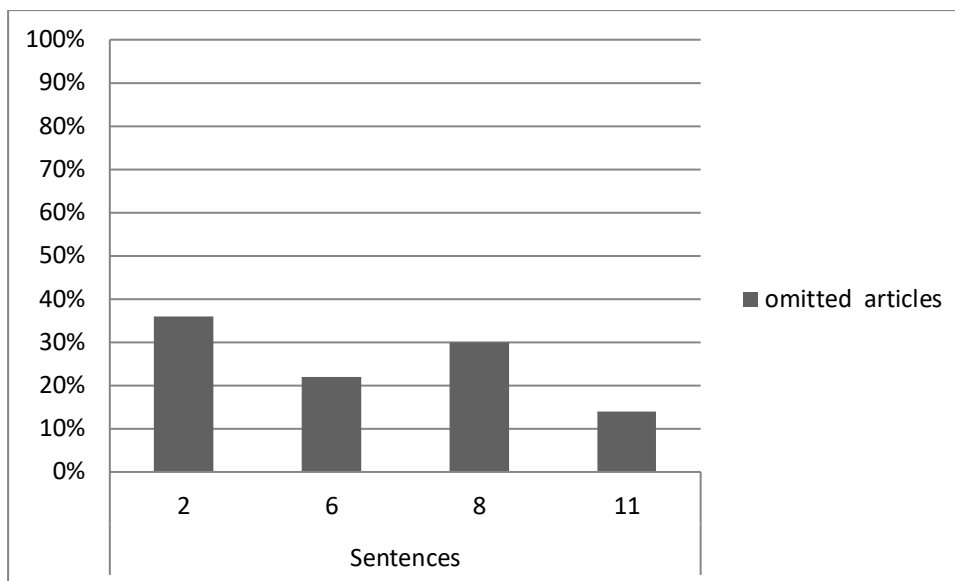The results are shown in the graph below:

Figure 7: *Ex. 2 – the results of all grades –incorrect and omitted article*

Figure 7 presents the results of students at the lower-secondary school – the results of which articles are omitted. The results prove that these sentences were problematic to the learners. The failure rate equaled to or was lower than 36%. The remaining 64% (and higher) show the success rate of students.

The worst results occurred in sentence 2:

*2. My parents visited **the** USA last year.*

36% (67/186) of learners chose the incorrect answer – *(a zero article),* thus, they omitted the article. All remaining students, 64% (119/186), circled the correct article *the,* so they used the definite article according to grammar rules.

*8. Bill is **the** biggest in our class.*

Sentence 8 was the second one which had the worst result out of these four sentences. Up to 30% (55/186) of students circled the incorrect option - *(a zero article).* And remaining 70% (131/186) of all students did not omit the article in written form, and they answered correctly *the.*

*6. Neil Armstrong is **the** first man to walk on the moon.*
*11. Welcome to **the** City of London!*

Learners completed sentences 6 and 11 better than the two mentioned before. 22% (41/186) omitted the article when deciding for – *(a zero article).* 78% (145/186) of all learners filled sentence number 6 correctly with *the*.

It can be considered positively that only 14% (26/186) of students omitted the article and used– *(a zero article).* And the total of 86% (160/186) of students filled in sentence 11 correctly using *the*.

The results show that there was no sentence with a success rate of 100% in this second exercise. However, some sentences did not seem to cause frequent problems for students. The choice for sentences 6 and 11 was the best. The failure rate was equal to or was lower than 22% in these two sentences.

The results showed that the incorrect usage of articles was higher in most cases than the omitting the articles. Therefore the hypothesis number 2 was disproved.

5.4   Making fewer mistakes in indefinite articles

H3: *Students make fewer mistakes in indefinite articles "a, an".*

Hypothesis number 3 is focused on different abilities of students to use indefinite and definite articles. We anticipate indefinite articles *a/an* to be mastered more than the definite one.

This part deals with the test results of all classes at the lower-secondary school. The students' results were again counted and analyzed as with the hypothesis number 2. The main centre of attention will be given to exercise 1, where one of the articles *a, an, the*, or – *(a zero article)* had to be filled in. The exercise 2 will not be discussed, because it does not deal with indefinite articles. The exercise 3 will not be discussed in this subchapter because it will be analyzed with the hypothesis number 4.

Since this part focuses on making fewer mistakes in indefinite articles, the article *an* mistaken for the form *a* will also be considered acceptable. However, this will always be mentioned in the analysis of the results.

For a better overview, sentences with a correctly filled-in article (and other incorrect articles) will always be placed in a separate graph. That means there will be 3

different graphs which clearly show which article was filled in correctly in the given sentences and which ones incorrectly. The total numbers of all correct and incorrect articles in the individual sentences were counted, converted to a percentage, and presented in the graph.
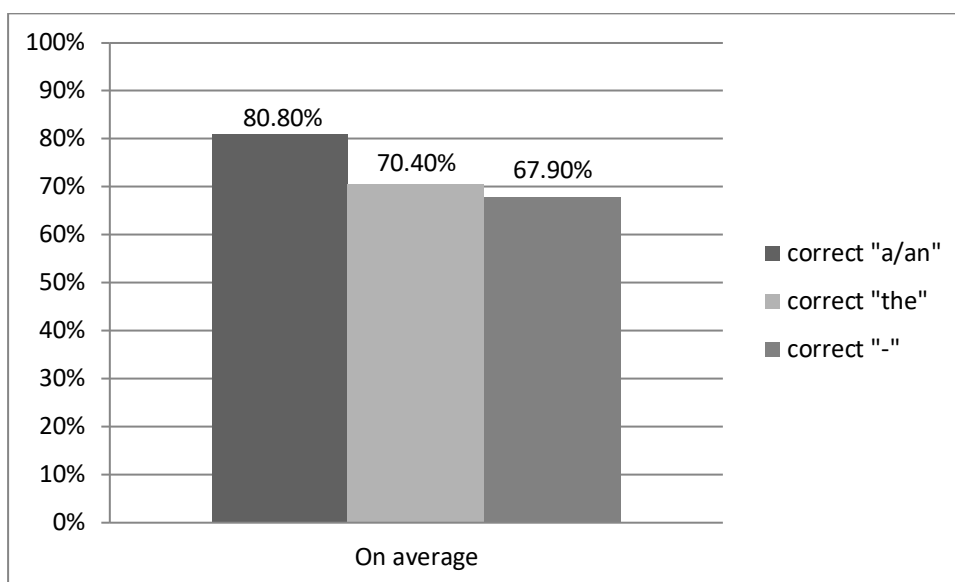
5.4.1 Test results – exercise 1

Figure 8: Success rate of students – the results of all grades

Initially, Figure 8 shows the overall results from exercise 1, it presents the students' success rate at dealing with particular articles. In this exercise, there were 8 gaps in which the indefinite article *a/an* had to be filled. The students could get a total of 1,488 points (8 gaps x 186 students). They actually obtained 1,203 points in this exercise, their success rate thus was 80,8%. Then, there were 11 gaps where completing the definite article *the* was correct. The students could get a total of 2,046 points (11 gaps x 186 students). They completed these 11 gaps (where the usage of *the* was correct) for 1,440 points. Their success rate was then 70,4%. The remaining 7 gaps had to be filled in with – *(a zero article)*. The students could receive a total of 1,302 points (7 gaps x 186 students). They managed to complete these 7 gaps correctly for just 884 points, so their success rate was 67,9%.

5.4.2 Correct sentences with the indefinite article a / an

Firstly, 8 gaps (from the total of 26) in exercise 1, where the indefinite article *a / an* had to be used, were analyzed. It concerned the gaps 4, 5, 6, 18, 19, 21, 24, and 25.
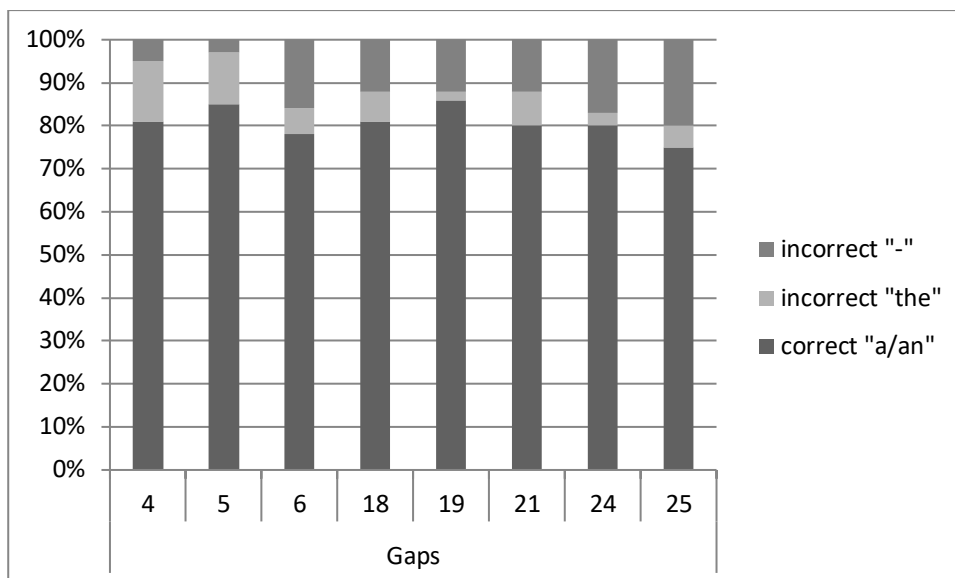
Figure 9: The results of all grades – correct and incorrect usage of articles

Figure 9 clearly demonstrates the results of students from the 6th to the 9th grade. It shows the ratio among using correct article *a/an* and other incorrect articles *the* and - *(a zero article).* There was no gap with the success rate of 100%. The success rate of all gaps equaled to or was higher than 75%.

The worst results were in the gaps 6 and 25:

Sarah: Okay, that's (6) __ (a) great idea.

Ryan: Wow, really? What (25) __ (a) pity, it is not (26) __ (the) same here!

Gap (6) was filled in correctly with *a* in 78% cases (145/186). 0,5% of all learners from these 78% represents using the form *an* (1/186). As mentioned above, this was considered to be the correct option. Then, 6% (11/186) of learners chose the incorrect option *the* and the rest 16% of learners (30/186) chose – *(a zero article).*

The total number of correct answers in gap (25) was 75% (139/186). As for the incorrect answers, 5% (10/186) of all learners filled in *the* and 20% (37/186) decided for – *(a zero article).*

All grades were the most successful in the gaps 5 and 19. The success rates were equal to or higher than 85%.

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5.4.3 Correct sentences with the definite article the

In this second part, the attention is given to other 11 gaps (from the total of 26) in exercise 1 where the definite article *the* had to be used. It concerned the gaps: 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 20, 23, and 26.
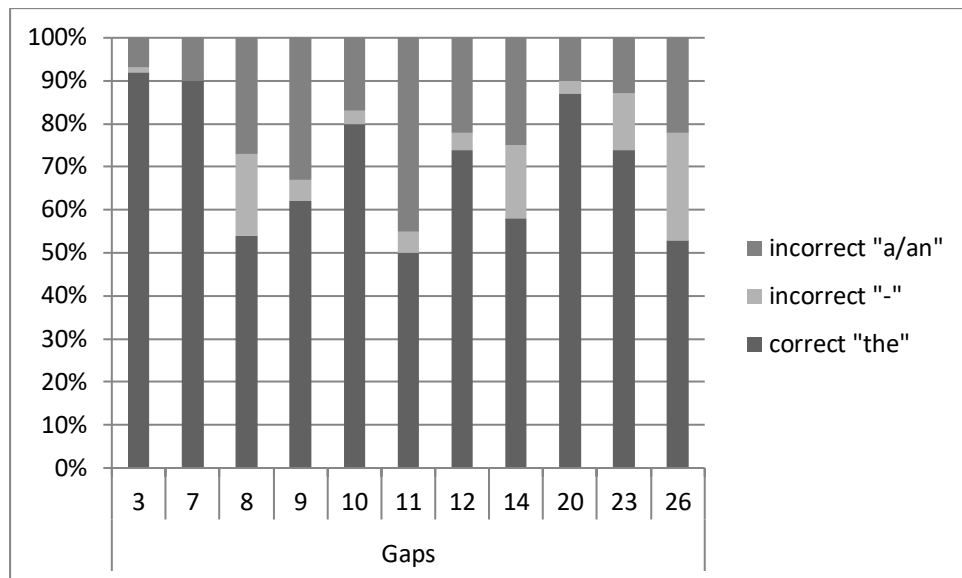

Figure 10: *The results of all grades – correct and incorrect usage of articles*

Figure 10 presents the results of all grades in these 11 gaps. It shows the ratio between using the correct article *the* and incorrect articles *a/an* and - *(a zero article)* again. There was no gap with 100% success either. The success rate of all gaps equaled to 50% or was higher than that.

The worst results were in the gaps 8, 11 and 26:

*Ryan: Well, we are here, watching (8) __ **(the)** kangaroos. (9) __ **(The)** lion is next to (10) __ **(the)** kangaroo. (11) __ **(The)** elephant is behind (12) __ **(the)** lion.*

*Ryan: Wow, really? What (25) __ **(a)** pity, it is not (26) __ **(the)** same here!*

Gap (8) was filled in correctly with *the* for 54% (100/186). The incorrect answers spread between 27% (51/186) of learners who completed *a/an* and 19% (35/186) answering – *(a zero article)*.

Gap (11) had the highest frequency of incorrect answers. Only half of the students (50%; 93/186) filled in correctly *the*. All remaining students completed the gaps

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incorrectly. Up to 45% (84/186) of learners decided to write *a/an* - interestingly, 4% (8/186) of students chose the second form *a* even though the word "elephant" begins with a vowel. And 5% (9/186) of learners wrote – *(a zero article)*.

Gap (26) represented another problem for half of the students as it was mentioned with the hypothesis 1. Only 53% (99/186) of learners filled in this gap correctly using *the*. The students with incorrect answers are balanced, as 22% (40/186) of students selected the indefinite article *a/an* and 25% (47/186) of students selected the other incorrect option – *(a zero article)*.

The most successful were the gaps 3 and 7. The success rates were equal to or higher than 90% there.

5.4.4 Correct sentences with – (a zero article)

In this third part, the centre of attention is given to the last 7 gaps (from the total of 26) in exercise 1 where the *zero article* had to be filled in. It included the gaps 1, 2, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 22.

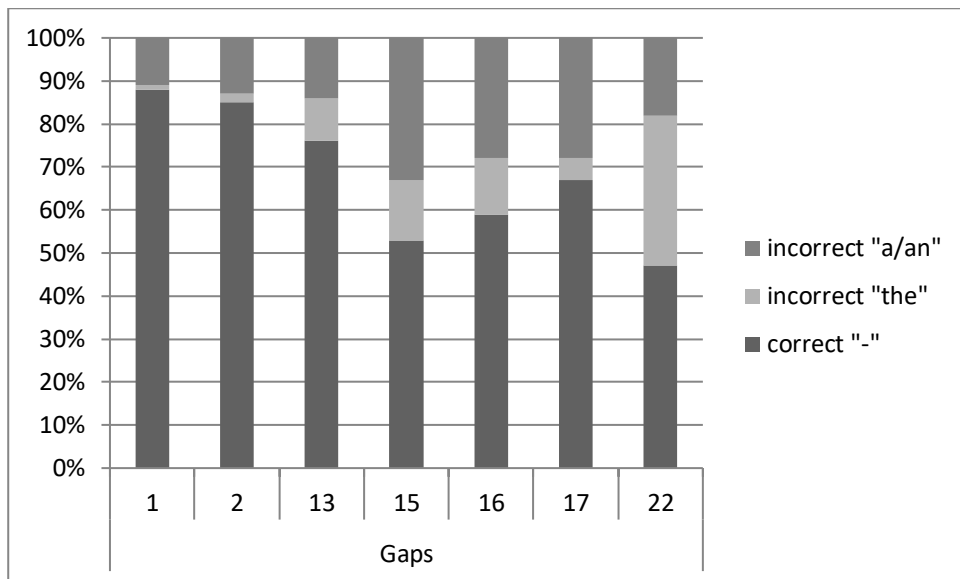
Figure 11: *The results of all grades – correct and incorrect usage of articles*

Figure 11 clearly shows the test results of the 6th to the 9th graders in the remaining 7 gaps. It presents the ratio among using the correct *zero article* and other incorrect articles *a/an* and *the*. None of these gaps was 100% correct. The success rate of all gaps equaled to or was higher than 47%.

The worst results were in the gaps 15, 16, and 22:

*Sarah: Look at (13) __ **(the)** elephants! Do you know that they are (14) __ **(the)** largest land animals in the world? Also, the African elephant is (15) __ **(-)** bigger and (16) __ **(-)** taller than the Asian elephant.*

*Sarah: Yes, I am. I enjoy it (19) __ **(a)** lot! Can you imagine going to (20) __ **(the)** zoo three times (21) __ **(a)** week? In (22) __ **(-)** Indiana, some kids do because their school is at (23) __ **(the)** zoo.*

Gaps (15) and (16) seemed to cause a lot of problems for the learners. The results show that learners struggle while using comparative forms of adjectives; some did not have the knowledge that there is no article with comparative forms of adjectives. 53% (99/186) of students decided correctly not to fill anything in gap (15). Unfortunately, one third of all children (33%; 61/186) completed incorrectly *a/an* and 14% (26/186) of students filled in other incorrect article *the*.

The results of the gap (16) were quite similar to the gap (15). Only 59% (110/186) of all students did not fill in any article *(a zero article)* and this decision was correct. All remaining answers were incorrect. Up to 28% (52/186) of students completed the gap with *a/an* and 13% (24/186) of students selected the definite article *the*.

The last gap which caused problems was gap (22). Less than half of the students (47%; 87/186) decided for – *(a zero article),* others' answers were wrong. 18% (34/186) of learners selected *a/an* and 35% (65/186) of learners selected another incorrect option - *the*.

The gaps 1 and 2 were filled in correctly most often. The success rates were equal to or higher than 85% there.

To summarize the results, it is shown that there was not any gap filled in correctly for 100% in this exercise 1. At the same time, it can be claimed that the lowest error rate was in the correct usage of indefinite articles. Either students really know how to use this article correctly according to the grammatical rules or they just use it based on their intuitions. They may have also decided for the indefinite article because they might have felt that while using the indefinite article, they make fewer mistakes.

The results in the gaps where the article *the* or – *(a zero article)* had to be filled in were worse than in the gaps with the correct article *a/an*. There were more cases in these gaps where students filled in the indefinite articles. They were probably estimating and we anticipate that they were not sure which article has to be used, hence they decided to complete the gap with *a/an*. The hypothesis number 3 was confirmed.

5.5   The results of exercise 3

H4: *Students make the most mistakes in the correction of mistakes because it is the most difficult type of exercise.*

Hypothesis 4 is focused on the fact that exercises where the task is to correct mistakes in articles is the most difficult types of exercise. In this kind of exercise, students are likely to make mistakes, such as correcting articles which are actually correct.

The main centre of attention in this last part of the diploma thesis is given to exercise 3. Exercise 3 contains 15 sentences with 16 hidden mistakes which the students had to find. There were 2 sentences, sentence 8 and sentence 10, which were correct. However, there were also 3 sentences (sentence 2, 6 and 12) with 2 hidden mistakes. The first mistake in each sentence is referred to as (2a, 6a, 12a) and the second one as b (2b, 6b, 12b)   both in the analysis and in the graph. Exercises 1 and 2 will not be discussed again as they were analyzed in previous three subchapters.

This part again analyzes the results of all grades at the lower-secondary school. The students' results will be analyzed and evaluated together as with the hypotheses 2 and 3. The total number of articles which were not corrected in the correct way were counted, converted to percentage and presented in the graph.

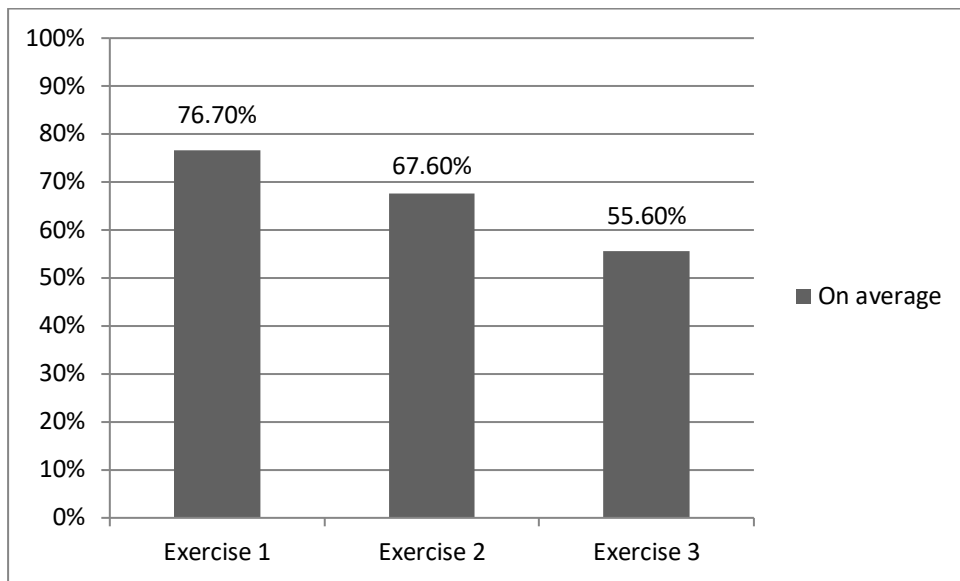### 5.5.1 Comparison of the results - exercises 1, 2, 3

Figure 12: *Success rate of students – the results of all grades*

Figure 12 clearly shows the overall results of all grades in all three exercises (1, 2 and 3). Their success rates in particular exercises are presented individually. After adding up all the points and converting them to a percentage, we can see that students had the best results in the first exercise. The students' success rate reached 76,7%. The results of the students in the second exercise were worse than the results of the first one. Students reached only 67,6%. The last exercise had the worst results in comparison with exercises 1 and 2 as the success rate reached only 55,6%. Unfortunately, it consists of just over a half the correct answers.

5.5.2 Exercise 3 – incorrect sentences

Exercise 3 consisted of a test with 15 sentences where 16 mistakes concerning the use of articles were hidden. Students had to find these mistakes and correct them – by crossing out incorrectly used articles and adding the missing articles to the text.
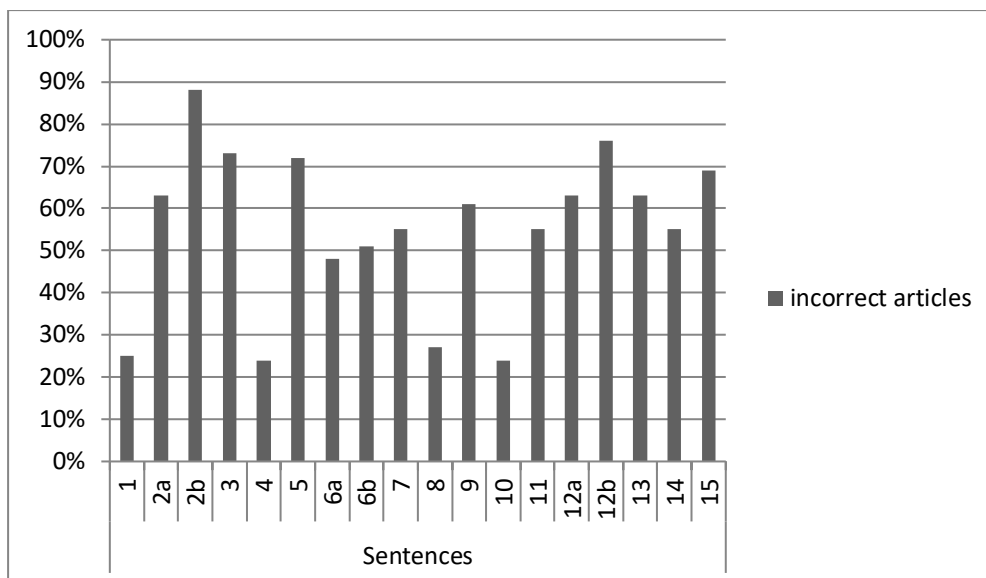
Figure 13: *Ex. 3 – the results of all grades – incorrect articles in sentences*

Figure 13 presents the students' results in particular sentences. It shows their incorrect usage of one of the articles in these sentences. The results are clearly shown in percentage.

Some sentences in the third exercise were managed well by the students but some not. Sentences 2, 3, 5 and 12 were the most problematic for learners. The failure rates were equal to 72% or higher there.

*(1) Hello! I am ~~the~~ Emma Parker. **(2)** I'm twelve years old and I live in ~~a~~ London, the capital of **the** UK. **(3)** There are **a** lot of tourist attractions. (4) I live in a big house with ~~the~~ my parents, my brother and my sister. **(5)** I am **the** youngest one from my family. (6) My dad is **an** architect and my mum is **a** teacher. (7) ~~A~~ **The** house has 2 floors. (8) There are six rooms in our house. (9) There is **a** big poster of my favourite singer in my room.*

*(10) I go to West Park Secondary School. (11) My favourite subject is ~~a~~ Math. **(12)** As for my hobbies, I love ~~the~~ drama, reading books and I also play **the** piano. (13) I go to drama lessons twice ~~the~~ **a** week with my friend, Emily. (14) She lives in the same street, so she comes to our house on ~~a~~ Friday. (15) In ~~an~~ **the** evening we watch TV together.*

Sentence (2), especially its second part (marked in the graph as 2b): *"…the capital of UK."* had the highest frequency of incorrect answers. A total of 88% (164/186) learners did not find the mistake and left *zero article* there. Only 12% (22/186) knew there has to be a definite article before "UK" and they filled in *the*.

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Up to 73% (136/186) did not notice the mistake in sentence (3). 71% (132/186) left this sentence without article *(a zero article)* and 2% (4/186) completed *the* incorrectly. Only 27% (50/186) found the mistake and completed *a* before "lot of".

Sentence (5) was problematic for a lot of students as well. 72% (133/186) of learners left the sentence as it was – 69% (128/186) left it with the missing article *(a zero article)* and 3% (5/186) completed *a* before the superlative form of an adjective. 28% (53/186) completed correctly *the*.

Sentence (12), especially its second part marked as 12b in the graph, also represented a real problem for three quarters of children – 76% (141/186). 67% (124/186) left the omitted article there, 5% (9/186) completed *a* incorrectly and 4% (8/186) filled in the preposition *on* (despite the fact that this is not an article). Only 24% (45/186) of learners answered correctly and filled in *the*.

There were some cases where the correct parts of the sentences have been individually corrected by students. Typical examples were the following sentences:

*(4) I live in **a big house** with ~~the~~ **my parents**, my brother and my sister.*

In sentence number (4), 76% (141/186) crossed out correctly *the* before "my parents". But 14% (26/186) of learners corrected also the correct part of the sentence "a big house". 5% (9/186) of them crossed out the article *a* and the rest (9%; 17/186) of learners filled in *the* instead of the correct article *a*.

*(12) As for my hobbies, I love ~~the~~ **drama**, **reading books** and I also **play the piano**.*

Another typical example of correcting the correct parts of a sentence was sentence (12). Despite the fact that this sentence had poor overall results also in parts 12a ("~~the~~ drama") and 12b ("play the piano") where students did not find two mistakes that were hidden there, they also corrected the correct part "reading books". The results showed that 13% (24/186) of students added the article *the* (9%; 17/186) or *a* (4%, 7/186) before the word "books".

The results summarize that no sentence was announced correctly by all students. Nevertheless, there were some sentences in which the students performed much better than in other ones. Students performed the most successfully in sentences 1, 4, 8, and 10. Their

success rates were around 75%. Most mistakes occurred in sentences where the article was omitted and students did not realize it. In a few sentences, students corrected articles which were actually correct.

The comparison of all three exercises showed that exercise 3 had the worst results. It was proved that correction of mistakes is the most difficult type of exercise. Therefore the last hypothesis number 4 was confirmed as well.

CONCLUSION

Articles are parts of English utterances; they determine nouns and give them a certain meaning. The decision which articles should be used before a noun has an important impact on the meaning of this noun. Without articles or with them being used incorrectly, it may change the meaning of the utterance. This diploma thesis deals with the issues of correct usage of articles, focusing on mistakes made by students of the lower-secondary school.

The thesis was divided into two parts. The first one, the theoretical part, was devoted to teaching of English articles, their types and rules of their correct usage. It described the most common mistakes in articles and types of their correction. It also dealt with teaching and practicing articles. Furthermore, examples of the most common mistakes in articles were presented.

The main aim of the practical part was to find out what types of mistakes in using articles are made by students at the lower-secondary school most often. Students attending Čerčany elementary school were tested and their mistakes were then analyzed. The administered test consisted of three parts – three specific exercises dealing with articles.

The results of the test were not much surprising. The results confirmed three of four established hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 was confirmed as it was proved that younger students (the 6th graders) did not master the usage of the articles in the same way as the older students (9th graders) did. Their results were worse. Hypothesis 2 was disproved because the incorrect usage of articles was higher in most cases than the choice to omit the article. The next hypothesis, hypothesis 3, which dealt with mastering the indefinite article in a better way than the definite one was also confirmed. It was proved that the lowest error rate was in the correct usage of indefinite articles. The last hypothesis, hypothesis 4, was confirmed as well. After the comparison of all three exercises, exercise 3 had the worst results. The results showed the correction of mistakes is the most difficult type of exercise. All students managed to fill in this exercise to just over 50% of correct answers.

I believe that this thesis may be motivating for the students at our lower-secondary school who participated in completing the test and help them think more about the use of articles in expressing their thoughts in English; they may focus on improving these most

frequent mistakes. It may serve the students as a clear blueprint of how to use the articles in English correctly. This thesis may be also useful for teachers of English as a foreign language as they may focus on the most frequent mistakes made by students and try to practice them intensively through various exercises.

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ANNOTATION

Jméno a příjmení:	Pavlína Wastlová
Katedra nebo ústav:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Jana Kořínková, Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2021

Název práce:	Výuka anglických členů
Název v angličtině:	Teaching English Articles
Anotace práce:	Práce se zabývá výukou anglických členů, jejich dělením a pravidly jejich správného používání. Práce dále popisuje nejčastější chyby a typy oprav. Praktická část zjišťuje, jaké chyby ve členech dělají žáci na 2. stupni základní školy nejčastěji. Praktická část shrnuje poznatky na základě výsledků z testu, který byl těmto žákům zadán.
Klíčová slova:	Člen určitý, člen neurčitý, člen nulový, výuka gramatiky, základní škola, test.
Anotace v angličtině:	The thesis deals with teaching of English articles, their division, and rules of their correct use. It also describes the most common mistakes in articles and their correction. The practical part finds out what mistakes in articles are most often made by students at the lower-secondary school. The practical part summarizes the findings based on the results of a test that was assigned to students.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	The definite article, the indefinite article, zero article, teaching grammar, elementary school, test.
Rozsah práce:	76 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický jazyk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Test distributed to the students at the lower-secondary school

CLASS:

Exercise 1: *Choose **a/ an/ the/ -** (**for zero article**) to complete the following dialogue.*
*Vyber jeden ze členů **a/ an/ the/ -** (**žádný člen**) a doplň ho do mezer v následujícím rozhovoru, tak, aby byl rozhovor správně.*

At the Zoo
Sarah: Hello, (1) __ Ryan! Where are you going?
Ryan: Hello, (2) __ Sarah! I am going to (3) __ zoo to see (4) __ kangaroo, an elephant
        and (5) __ lion. Let's go with me!
Sarah: Okay, that's (6) __ great idea.

Sarah: Look at (7) __ map. Where are we now?
Ryan: Well, we are here, watching (8) __ kangaroos. (9) __ lion is next to (10) __
        kangaroo. (11) __ elephant is behind (12) __ lion.
Sarah: Look at (13) __ elephants! Do you know that they are (14) __ largest land animals
        in the world? Also, the African elephant is (15) __ bigger and (16) __ taller than the
        Asian elephant.
Ryan: That sounds (17) __ interesting!

Ryan: Are you having (18) __ good time, Sarah?
Sarah: Yes, I am. I enjoy it (19) __ lot! Can you imagine going to (20) __ zoo three times
        (21) __ week? In (22) __ Indiana, some kids do because their school is at (23) __
        zoo. I have (24) __ friend there.
Ryan: Wow, really? What (25) __ pity, it is not (26) __ same here!

Exercise 2: *Choose **the** or **–** (**for zero article**) to complete the following sentences.*
*Vyber **the** nebo **–** (**žádný člen**) tak, aby byly následující věty správně. (Správný člen zakroužkuj nebo zvýrazni nebo nesprávný člen rovnou smaž.)*

1. Kids don't go to ***the / -*** school on Saturday.
2. My parents visited ***the / -*** USA last year.
3. Tokyo is in ***the / -*** Japan.
4. **The / -** Geography is my favourite subject.
5. There are **the / -** books on the shelf.
6. Neil Armstrong is **the / -** first man to walk on the moon.
7. What is she watching on ***the / -*** TV?
8. Bill is ***the / -*** biggest in our class.
9. I really love ***the / -*** swimming.
10. Do you like ***the / -*** coffee?

11. Welcome to *the / -* City of London!
12. What did you do on *the / -* Friday?

Exercise 3: *Read the text below. Find **mistakes in the articles** and correct them.*
*Přečti si text níže. Najdi **chyby ve členech** a oprav je. (Nesprávně užité členy rovnou smaž nebo škrtni a chybějící členy do textu doplň.)*

My life
(1) Hello! I am the Emma Parker. (2) I'm twelve years old and I live in a London, the capital of UK. (3) There are lot of tourist attractions. (4) I live in a big house with the my parents, my brother and my sister. (5) I am youngest one from my family. (6) My dad is a architect and my mum is teacher. (7) A house has 2 floors. (8) There are six rooms in our house. (9) There is big poster of my favourite singer in my room.
(10) I go to West Park Secondary School. (11) My favourite subject is a Math. (12) As for my hobbies, I love the drama, reading books and I also play piano. (13) I go to drama lessons twice the week with my friend, Emily. (14) She lives in the same street, so she comes to our house on a Friday. (15) In an evening we watch TV together.