

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF TEACHERS OF SLOVAK LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SLOVAK LANGUAGE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION INTENTIONS

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Abstract

Currently, our society is determined by various changes related to global events. The most significant of them, which also affected education, is the war in Ukraine and the wave of arrival of foreigners arriving to our territory. This is also related to the inclusion of pupils with a different mother tongue in primary and secondary schools and the growing need for teachers to use more often the didactics of the Slovak language as a second language in practice. The teachers also respond to the mentioned change with their demand for a flexible transfer of the methodology of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language which, however, has its own specifics. For this reason, it is necessary for teachers to develop their professional competences with the support of legitimate options within the framework of professional (further) education. In this paper, we focus on the description of the theoretical foundations of the term professional education of Slovak language and literature teachers with an emphasis on the teaching of the Slovak language as a second language. At the same time, the paper presents partial results of the research aimed at identifying and analyzing the educational needs of teachers of Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on Slovak as a second language.

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Key words

Professional (further) education, Slovak language and literature teacher, Slovak language as a second language, educational needs, research

Introduction

The teacher is one of the most important elements of the educational process. A.P. Čechov stated that a teacher must be an artist who loves his work warmly, which we can only agree with. He fulfills the role of a dominant agent, actively influencing the course of the educational process despite the fact that he is affected by changes in society. Currently, our education system is modified not only by economic considerations, but also by the migration crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. Brozmanova, Cabanova & Lynch, (2022: 65) also state: *"In a globalized world, it is necessary to accept all differences as a natural phenomenon, and not only to respect them, but to perceive them as a natural part of the life of society."* Teachers are forced to adapt their professional competences of a specific situation in classes where small immigrants from Ukraine come with low or no language skills in the Slovak language and literature. As Spendla (1974: 13) states: *"The personality of the teacher is of key importance for the successful operation of schools of all*

grades. His work cannot be reduced only to employment, because it has immense social importance. It requires extraordinary sensitivity, patience, a genuine relationship with children and students, and a deep inner interest in their development."

Teacher training has always been one of the priorities of the state's educational policy. Since 2009, when the legislative standard was changed, Act No. 317/2009 Coll. on pedagogic employees and professional employees and on the amendment of some laws as amended, the state may feel an increased interest in the education and learning of pedagogic employees as part of professional development.

1 Professional (further) education of Slovak language and literature teachers

We are learning all our lives. An important person who accompanies us through education is the teacher. Michvocikova (2022: 120) states in her study: "A pedagogue can be considered an expert who possesses a wide range of qualities necessary for the realization of the teaching profession." Teachers and their professional development are a priority in every society, which is why their profession is very demanding .

From a teacher's point of view, the most important act is probably Act 414/2021 Coll. on pedagogical and professional employees, amending Act no. 138/2019 Coll. on teaching staff and professional staff and on amendments to certain laws with effect from 01.01.2022. In the above-mentioned law, in § 2, paragraph 2, a pedagogical employee is characterized as a natural person who performs work according to § 6 par. 1. Professional development according to § 40 of Act 414/2021 Coll. on pedagogical employees and professional employees and on the amendment and supplementation of certain laws and as amended is the process of developing, deepening, perfecting and expanding professional competences, acquiring professional competences for the performance of specialized activities or for the performance of the activities of a leading pedagogical employee or the performance of the activities of a leading professional employee, but also the acquisition of professional competences of a higher career level and their verification for inclusion in a higher career level, use and evaluation of acquired professional competences.

The teaching profession is very demanding and develops in several stages. Kollarikova (1993 in Kasacova, 2004: 45) lists four stages of the development of the teaching profession:

1. Orientation stage in which young people find themselves in the period before entering university, when they try to choose a suitable course of study that will prepare them for their future profession.
2. The preparatory stage is the actual preparation for the teaching profession, it can take place at secondary pedagogical schools or universities which focus on pedagogical education.
3. The adaptation stage is the period after graduation, which is characterized by adaptation to the teaching profession and work.

4. The self-regulation stage follows the adaptation stage, when the teacher is able to solve problems and tasks and should also include further education of the teacher.

Through education, adults expand their knowledge and skills, develop already acquired competence, improve their technical and professional qualifications, or change their attitudes and behavior in order to increase the perspective of their personal development (Pavlik, Kohout & Chaloupka, 1997: 16). Lazarova et al. (2006: 15) considers in-service teacher training as *"...a powerful instrument of educational policy in the service of efforts to modernize the educational system."* Teachers must always respond flexibly to new knowledge and a changing world view, also follow new scientific knowledge in the developing didactics of their subjects and implement them in the teaching of their subjects. It already follows from the previous lines that teachers must constantly educate themselves and work on their professional development. Teachers are aware of this fact and need, therefore most of them try to acquire new knowledge and skills and apply them in their practice. As Lazarova (2005: 109) mentions: *"Being a learning and innovative teacher ready to implement changes becomes a necessity."*

The profession of Slovak language and literature teacher has an irreplaceable place in the educational process. It is desirable not only to be an excellent expert in the given subject, but also to have a positive attitude towards the Slovak language and literature and to master the language at an expert level. According to Ligos (2009: 97) and Pacovská (2010: 344), as well as others, a teacher of Slovak language and literature should have specific skills and competences, such as the ability to observe the language in its dynamics through the study of language expressions, to observe literary language in its relations with forms others and know how to communicate about the given aspects of the language or the ability to conduct pedagogical communication and others.

In the professional education of teachers of the Slovak language and literature, the question of teaching the Slovak language to children of foreigners (pupils with a different mother tongue).

Currently, there are more pupils with a different mother tongue who do not know Slovak, and it is the teachers who are expected to create a suitable space for them in which they can learn.

Due to the current situation related to migration, the need for further training of Slovak language and literature teachers in the field of Slovak as a second language has increased. Further professional education of teachers, through educational activities and programs, is intended to help improve the performance of teachers and their professional development. Several institutions deal with the Slovak language as a second language (in recent times, a foreign language). We can mention two that implement the Slovak language as a second language in courses for foreign students preparing for Slovak universities. The first of them is the Language and Vocational Training of the Center for Further Education of the Comenius University (Pekarovicova, 2020). However, the mentioned institutions do not provide training for teachers of the Slovak language and literature. At the same time, educational institutions such as the Methodological and Pedagogical Center,

Raabe or the State Pedagogical Institute and others did not recently offer professional (further) education for teachers of the Slovak language and literature focused on the Slovak language as a second language.

As part of the professional (further) education of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language, in the years 2014-2019 the Methodological and Pedagogical Center provided the opportunity to complete the educational program Implementation of the state language for children of foreigners in the educational process of primary and secondary schools. In connection with the inclusion of Ukrainian pupils in primary and secondary schools, the Methodological and Pedagogical Center is currently organizing webinars with an emphasis on Slovak as a second language.). Currently, instead of the term Slovak as a foreign language, the term Slovak as a second language is starting to be used, so we also lean towards it. Sedláková et al. (2015: 20) states: "In the professional literature, a second language is considered to be a language acquired after the mother tongue, but not completely foreign, because it is the language used in the environment in which the individual moves and needs it for social survival."

The number of included pupils with a different mother tongue (Ukrainian) is also shown in Table 1:

Table 1 Comparison of the number of integrated Ukrainian pupils in primary schools in individual sample school years

| | School year 2017/2018 | School year 2021/2022 | SSI as of 15.03.2022 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| together with pupils - foreigners | 2 192 | 4 727 | X |
| Ukrainian nationality | 143 | 131 | 14 087 |

Source: Statistical yearbook of education – primary schools as of 15 September 2017; Statistical yearbook of education - primary schools as of 09/15/2021. State school inspection as of March 15, 2022.

Also based on the above table, we can conclude that the first support is provided by the language teachers, who gradually try to teach these students Slovak as a second language through their own didactic materials and prepare them so that they understand the subjects taught at individual school levels.

On the basis of the above, we see the essence mainly in strengthening the education of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with the topic of the Slovak language as a second language, as well as in focusing on the didactic level of the Slovak language as a second language.

2 Methodology and research analyses

The issue of analyzing the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second

language is not included in the research, or only marginally. The research so far gives us only a general view of the educational needs of teachers.

By strengthening the professional competences and developing or innovating the knowledge and skills of teachers of the Slovak language and literature, it is possible to ensure that teachers of the Slovak language and literature are able to educate pupils with a different mother tongue in the current globalized world. At the same time, to be able to integrate pupils into the education of the Slovak language and literature subject as quickly as possible through various methods and procedures used in the Slovak language as a second language.

Based on the awareness of the need to ensure the professional education of teachers of the Slovak language and literature, after studying and analyzing theoretical sources and knowledge, we formulated the main goal of the research as follows: *Identify and analyze the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on Slovak as a second language and based on this finding propose adequate educational activities in the intentions of the solved issue.*

We carried out the research in 2021 as a part of descriptive research through an online questionnaire of our own construction. Through the results, we identify and analyze the educational needs of Slovak language and literature teachers with an emphasis on Slovak as a second language.

In the following subsections, we present the results of a survey conducted among teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language in the second grade of primary and secondary schools. We used only the selected, from our point of view, the most important findings for the presentation of the obtained data.

2.1 Research file

The research sample consisted of Slovak language and literature teachers of the second grade of primary and secondary schools who taught Slovak as a second language. 298 teachers were approached and 117 respondents participated in the research. As part of the research, we did not find out the locations of the schools where the research respondents worked. Most responses were recorded from women (90.6%), and men accounted for 9.4% of the survey. A sample set of respondents was chosen from the basic set of all Slovak language and literature teachers. Data were collected online through a questionnaire that we sent to the target sample by e-mail.

2.2 Research method

In pedagogical research, we implemented the questionnaire research method. The questionnaire survey was carried out in 2021 (in the period from March to April) through an online questionnaire of our own design.

When constructing the questionnaire, we proceeded according to the following steps:

- formulation of a specific goal and research questions,
- rethinking the structure of the questionnaire with an emphasis on the monitored problem,

- implementation of preliminary research, which served to verify whether all items in the questionnaire are formulated correctly,
- editing the questionnaire into its final form based on preliminary research.

We designed the questionnaire in two parts, in the beginning of which the respondents were familiarized with the content and purpose of the questionnaire and the instructions for filling it out.

The questionnaire contained 18 items, of which items 1-5 sought basic information about the respondent, such as gender, age, length of teaching experience, subcategory of teaching staff and career level. Another part of the questionnaire consisted of 13 items that were related to the mentioned issue and related, for example, to questions of professional training of teachers to work with pupils with a different mother tongue, to undergraduate training or to the use of forms and methods in teaching the Slovak language as a second language.

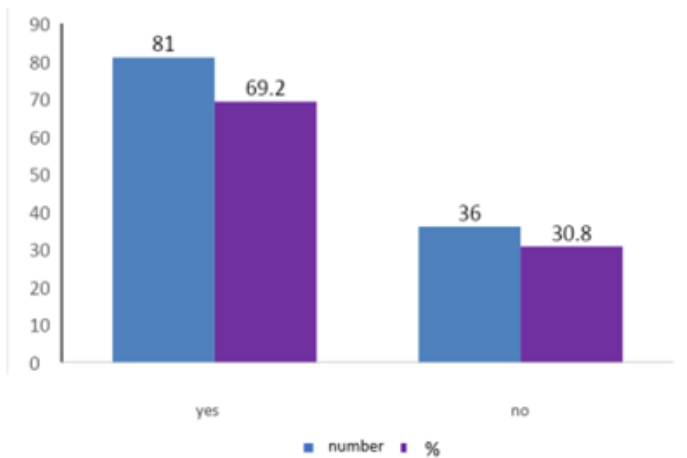
The implementation of the research was preceded by preliminary research, conducted on a smaller set of respondents in the number of 7 teachers of the Slovak language and literature, who implemented the teaching of the Slovak language as a second language. The aforementioned set had the same basic features as the research sample on which the research was carried out. Not all of the smaller sample were part of the research set, with the exception of four teachers. Preliminary research also took place in 2021, and the results from it served to correct the research strategy. As part of the questionnaire, we reduced the number of items and formally adjusted them so that they were as understandable as possible for the respondents and corresponded to the objectives of the dissertation as much as possible.

In view of the pandemic situation, we distributed the questionnaires to teachers online via e-mail addresses and after telephone contact.

We evaluated the obtained data using statistical methods and interpreted them in the form of graphs and tables. The aforementioned questionnaire mapped the educational needs of Slovak language and literature teachers, which are related to the Slovak language as a second language.

2.3 Analysis of selected research findings

As part of the results, we present descriptive statistics, which are divided according to the gender of the respondents.

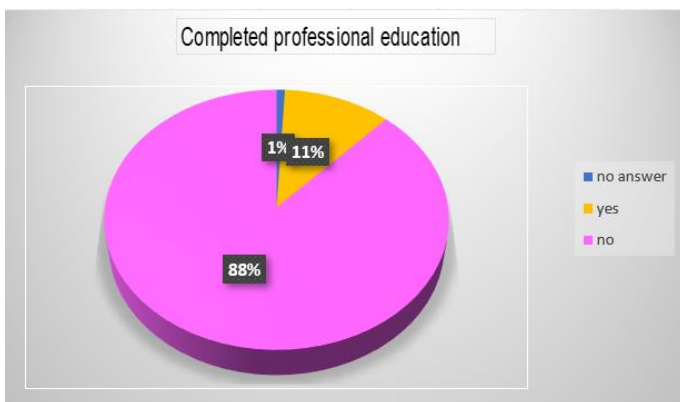


Graph 1 Evaluation of question 6 - Do you teach or have you taught pupils with a different mother tongue for whom Slovak is a second language?

Source: own

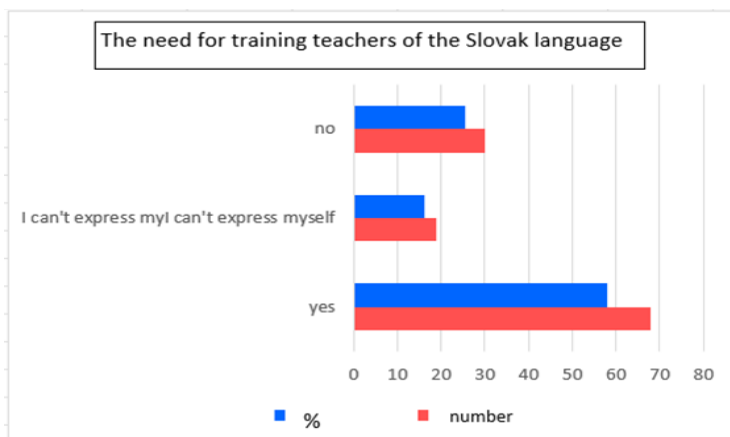
In graph 1, we can see the answers to the sixth question of the research questionnaire measurement, it was aimed at finding out whether the teachers teach, or have taught students with a different mother tongue, and based on the answer, the teachers were directed to other research questions. We assumed that we would obtain information on how many Slovak language and literature teachers we contacted had experience in teaching pupils with a different mother tongue in the recent period. From a percentage point of view, 69.2% of teachers teach pupils with a different mother tongue. 30.8% of Slovak language and literature teachers do not implement the Slovak language as a second language in teaching. The implementation of the Slovak language and literature in the teaching of pupils with a different mother tongue is significantly higher than not including the teaching of the Slovak language as a second language.

In the following graph (Graph 2), we will provide an overview of what further education teachers have completed during the last two years focused on the Slovak language as a second language.



Graph 2 Evaluation of question 9 - In the last two years, have you completed professional (further) education focused on the Slovak language as a second language?
Source: own

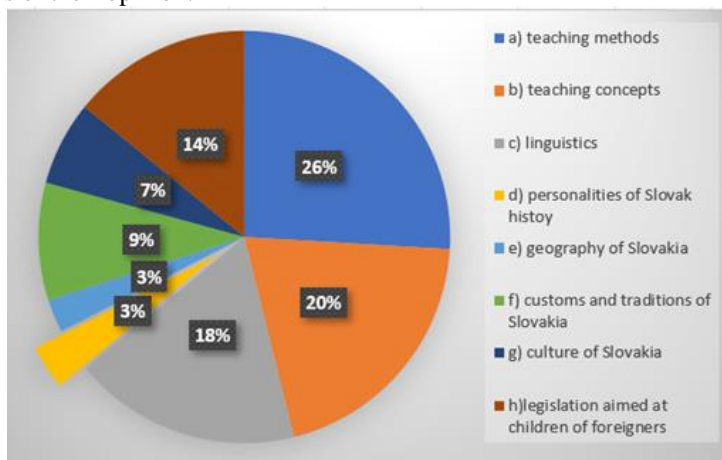
Within the given item, if the answer is positive, the respondents should state the name of the education and where they completed it, and if the answer is negative, they should state the reason why they did not graduate. Teachers expressed themselves mostly in the negative item, up to 88%. They pointed to reasons such as the absence of educational programs focused on the Slovak language as a second language. Some argued their lack of interest in attending educational activities. Others stated that there was no reason to seek out and complete an educational program. There were also answers about the lack of space for education in terms of time, or some teachers had completed education in the past, e.g. Didactics of Slovak as a foreign language course. As part of the positive response, Slovak language and literature teachers presented webinars on Slovak as a second language organized by the Methodological and Pedagogical Center, attended the education of foreign children at the State Pedagogical Institute, but also a seminar organized by the Studia Academica Slovaca institution (11.1%).



Graph 3 Evaluation of question 10 - Do you feel a current need to complete professional (further) education/educational activities focused on the Slovak language as a second language?

Source: own

Through research, we also demonstrated the greatest dominance of the current need to complete professional (further) education/educational activities focused on the Slovak language as a second language (58.1%) as one of the attributes of assistance in teaching pupils with a different mother tongue. An interesting result was also the item I can't express myself, which was filled in by 19 teachers of Slovak language and literature (16.2%) in terms of their opinion.



Graph 4 Evaluation of question 12 - What should be the content of professional (further) education focused on the Slovak language as a second language (please choose three alternatives). Source: own

In the given item (Chart 4), we focused on finding out which three alternatives should be the content of professional (further) education focused on the Slovak language as a second language. At the same time, we also offered the answer Other, in which the teachers had to indicate what, according to them, should be the content of the given professional education. Two of the most prominently evaluated items were teaching methods (25.9%) and teaching concepts (20.2%). Among the significant items, we can also include the field of linguistics, which reached 17.9%, and teachers would also be interested in legislation aimed at children of foreigners with a value of 14.1%.

Through a partial evaluation of selected items of the questionnaire, we found out the current state of the educational needs of Slovak language and literature teachers at primary and secondary schools. We pointed out the importance of identifying and analyzing the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with regard to the implementation of the Slovak language as a second language and also their professional development in this area, following the current situation in education. We

focused our attention on the issue of professional development of Slovak language and literature teachers in the given area.

Conclusion

The presented empirical study is focused on research into the identification and analysis of the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language. In this paper, we present the results of a questionnaire survey of the self-construction of selected items among 117 respondents, teachers of the Slovak language and literature, who implement the Slovak language as a second language in the educational process. From the achieved results, we conclude that currently teachers of the Slovak language and literature feel the need for professional development within the methodology of teaching the Slovak language as a second language, regardless of the length of their teaching experience. The results of the research pointed to insufficient preparation of Slovak language and literature teachers for the implementation of the educational process with an emphasis on teaching the Slovak language as a second language. It is clear from the resulting values that the educational institutions did not provide the possibility of education for teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language.

We consider the stated research conclusions to be a challenge in pedagogical practice, in which we recommend intensifying the creation of educational activities or educational programs aimed at developing the professional competences of teachers of the Slovak language and literature in the aforementioned area. Some institutions are currently responding to this challenge by conducting webinars focused on Slovak as a second language. The professional (further) education of teachers is thus not a negligible part of the professional development of a teacher of the Slovak language and literature.

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