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Management of professional education focusing on the teaching of the Slovak Language as a Foreign Language in the context of emigration processes

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Abstract

Society in Slovakia is currently determined by upheavals that are linked to global events. Slovak education is most significantly affected by the war in Ukraine. It is connected with the emigration of foreigners to our territory and the subsequent inclusion of pupils with a different language in primary and secondary schools. Based on this extraordinary situation, there is a need to respond to it flexibly and efficiently. Appropriate management mechanisms based on the principles of school management and educational technology are required with a focus on ensuring adequate preparation of Slovak language teachers for teaching pupils whose mother tongue is other than Slovak. Effective tools for solving the situation has not been created by the Slovak education system. The fulfillment of this challenge is the necessary implementation of an analysis of the high-quality educational needs of teachers and the subsequent implementation of its results for the creation of a suitable educational platform, either as part of undergraduate training or further professional education of teaching staff.

The presented study is therefore focused 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 foreign language. The results of empirical research identifying and analyzing the educational needs of the concerned teaching staff through adequate research methods are included. At the end of the scientific study, the key determinants of the creation of specific educational programs intended for the education of pupils with a mother tongue other than Slovak will be presented.

Keywords: professional development, professional (further) education, educational needs, Slovak language and literature teacher, Slovak language as a foreign language, emigration, research.

1 Introduction

Recently, changes in social events have been experienced by us. In 2022, a phenomenon that was not seen to such an extent in Slovakia emerged, namely the influx of immigrants from war-torn Ukraine. The term migration had been encountered in the past, but not on such a scale. Migration is a complex phenomenon that is used as an umbrella term for many different phenomena. It includes both voluntary and forced migration of people of different ages, education and origin, and at the same time, migration that deserves the specific interest of experts with different specializations (sociologists, politicians, economists, psychologists) is the migration of the young and highly educated generation (Gajdošová & Orosová et al., 2020). From the point of view of the UN, migration includes people who move in a given country for at least one year (International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2022). "Migration is both a cause and a consequence of spatial changes in the organization of society. It is a phenomenon, an event, an engine, a threat, a solution, a goal, complications and an advantage" (Vojtková, 2005, p. 1). Migration is considered the process of moving citizens for any reason, relocating from their original place to a new one. King (2007, p. 7) defines migration as: “The movement of people from one place or country to another where they want to settle”.

Such is the immigration of Ukrainians to a new country, where not only a new socio-cultural environment but also a new linguistic environment is encountered by them. Pupils in primary schools, whose mother tongue differs from Slovak, have been encountered by us for a long time or more frequently.This is primarily caused by population migration, when people from other countries come to our country, most often as individuals who later start a family here, or entire families of foreigners migrate to our country. As stated by Hájková (2014, p. 8), population movement is caused by people's efforts to find a job that would correspond to their ideas or find any job to make ends meet.

The most important element of the educational process, dealing with the inclusion of a student with a different mother tongue and their education, is the teacher. Not only foreign language teachers but primarily teachers of the Slovak language and literature are involved. Consequently, teachers are compelled to adapt their professional competences to the specific situation in classes where immigrants from Ukraine come with low or no language skills in the Slovak language and literature. As Špendla (1974, p. 13) states: "The personality of the teacher is of key importance for the successful operation of schools of all grades. Their 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." Pupils with a different mother tongue are included in schools on the basis of Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (School Act) and on amendments to certain laws (§ 146 paragraph 1), which defines the concept of children of foreigners and children of asylum seekers and children of Slovaks living abroad "provides education and training, accommodation and meals in schools under the same conditions as citizens of the Slovak Republic. As Hamilton (2013) states, challenges related to migration or learning a new language and adapting to new rules at school are also stressful for students. An important need for these students is to understand what people are saying, and at the same time, students' language skills directly contribute to their school experience (Liebkind, Jasinskaja-Lahti, & Solheim, 2004). Language awareness can also play an important role in language education through increasing awareness of the similarities of different languages and activating students' higher order thinking (Straková, 2020).

Teacher education and their professional development are currently considered one of the priorities of the state's educational policy. The most important law is 414/2021 Coll. on pedagogical and professional employees, amending Act no. 138/2019 Coll. on pedagogical employees and professional employees and on the amendment and addition of certain laws with effect from 01.01.2022, where professional development is defined as the process of developing, deepening, perfecting and expanding professional competences, acquiring professional competences for the performance of specialized activities, etc. The new, changing world view should be responded to flexibly by the teacher, and new scientific knowledge in the developing didactics of their subjects should be followed and implemented in the educational process.

The teacher of Slovak language and literature is irreplaceable in the educational process, also because of teaching Slovak as a mother tongue. The said teacher must not only be an excellent expert in the given teaching subject but is also required to have a positive attitude towards the Slovak language and literature and to master the language at an expert level. According to Ligoš (2009, p. 97) and Pacovská (2010, p. 344) at the same time, a teacher of Slovak language and literature must have specific skills and competences in linguistics and communication. In the professional education of teachers of the Slovak language and literature, the importance of teaching the Slovak language to children of foreigners (pupils with a different mother tongue) is also being recognized, as there is an increasing number of pupils with a different mother tongue who are not acquainted with Slovak in classes. Leeman and van Koeven (2018) summarized the trends in professional development focused on cultural diversity - typically focuses on expanding teachers' knowledge of facts about people, cultures, languages, as well as abstract concepts and theories related to diversity.

Also, according to Boeckmann (2018), all teachers in the system need initial, pre-service and in-service training specifically designed to enable them to cope with linguistic and cultural diversity. At the same time, he states that the documents of the Council of Europe and the European Union regarding teaching in a culturally and linguistically diverse environment shared similar findings and experience.

Due to the current situation related to migration, there has been an increased need for further education of Slovak language and literature teachers in the field of teaching Slovak as a foreign language. Further professional education of teachers is intended to help improve the quality of the teaching profession and its development through educational activities and programs. Herzog-Punzenberger (2022) mentions in his article that, in addition to new competencies, teachers and teacher students should be required to complete modules on the education of bilingual children. Professional (further) education for teachers of the Slovak language and literature focused on the Slovak language as a foreign language was not offered by Slovak educational institutions such as former the Methodological and Pedagogical Center or the State Pedagogical Institute (now both the National Institute of Education and Youth). The inclusion of Ukrainian children in schools and educational institutions has led to the state and school principals introducing requirements for the education of the Slovak language as a foreign language. Webinars with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a foreign language for primary and secondary school teachers have been organized by educational institutions as part of the professional (further) education of Slovak language and literature teachers with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a foreign language. Since it is important that teachers of the Slovak language and literature consistently teach the Slovak language as a foreign language when teaching pupils with a different mother tongue, they must be educated in this area in order to update their professional competences. Currently (in 2023), the Studia Academica Slovaca institution in cooperation with UNICEF and the National Institute

of Education and Youth offered the Didactics of Slovak as a Foreign Language educational program for teachers of the Slovak language and literature, which would provide further education for teachers of the Slovak language and literature. Thanks to it, the competences in teaching Slovak as a foreign/second language of selected Slovak language and literature teachers can be improved.

Jeoffrion et al. (2014) draws attention to the fact that a multilingual approach to language learning is a good approach that sees the learner's language repertoire as fluid and supports the acquisition of other languages. Migrant students who do not speak the language taught in school face significant disadvantages and achieve worse results in school (Falzon, Pisani and Cauchi, 2012). Based on this, it can be concluded that the language teachers became the biggest support, and Slovak as a foreign language was gradually taught to foreign students through their own didactic materials, preparing them to understand the subjects taught at individual levels of schools. On the basis of the above, it is important to strengthen the education of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with the topic of the Slovak language as a foreign language.

2 Research

As part of our research, we focused on the analysis of the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature, with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a foreign language, as a current issue. In the research so far, we can only find views on the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature on a general level. The development of professional competences of Slovak language and literature teachers should be focused on innovating knowledge and skills in various areas such as linguistic or intercultural, so that teachers of the Slovak language and literature are able to help students with a different mother tongue learn and integrate them into the education of the Slovak language subject and literature as quickly as possible.

On the basis of the aforementioned and the research of theoretical sources and knowledge, we set the main goal of the research as Identifying and analysing the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on Slovak as a foreign language and based on this finding, to propose adequate educational activities in the intentions of the addressed issue.

A quantitative methodology was used by the research design used in the above study. The research was carried out by us in 2021 as part of descriptive research through an online questionnaire of our own construction. Through the results, we more closely identified and analysed the educational needs of Slovak language and literature teachers with an emphasis on Slovak as a foreign language.

The questionnaire designed by us contained 18 items, where 1st to 5th items were related to demographic phenomena and the remaining 13 items were related to the issue of professional training of Slovak language and literature teachers to work with pupils with a different mother tongue and their professional development within the framework of Slovak language as a foreign language. Due to the pandemic situation in 2021, the questionnaires were distributed to teachers of Slovak language and literature online via e-mail after telephone contact.

Based on the issues of the terms professional education, migration and Slovak language as a foreign language, we realized that it is necessary to help teachers of the Slovak language and literature when working with pupils with a different mother tongue and to increase their professional competences through education aimed directly at them.

2.1 Research hypothesis

The article is focused on the identification and analysis of the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on Slovak as a foreign language in the Slovak Republic. The obtained data were evaluated using statistical methods and interpreted in the form of graphs and tables. The questionnaire mapped the educational needs of Slovak language and literature teachers, which are related to the Slovak language as a second language. From the previous pedagogical practice and the authors' own experiences, it was found that the mentioned issue could contribute to the improvement of the situation in the field of further education of teachers in the field of the Slovak language as a foreign language. At the same time, the formulation and creation of various activities or educational programs or procedures aimed at teachers of the Slovak language as a second language can be significantly influenced by this research.

The research problem was specified as relational - there is a correlation, or what is the close relationship between the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a foreign language and the existing educational activities aimed at their professional education? Based on Hendl (2009, p. 250), we can state that "the values of one variable tend to occur together with the values of the other variable." Based on the established research problem, the goal and the items of the descriptive survey carried out through the questionnaire, we stated null statistical hypotheses as part of solutions to a relational research problem. Each of the mentioned hypotheses expresses an assumed dependence or relationship between a

dependent and an independent variable (Gavora, 1999; Bačíková, Janovská, 2014). When formulating them, we based the methodological requirements as follows:

1. H0: What is the relationship between the need to complete professional education focusing on the Slovak language as a second language and the length of teaching practice? (items 3 and 10). Scientific assumption: Answers to items 3 and 10 are independent.
2. H0: What is the relationship between undergraduate training focused on teaching Slovak language and literature and the need for professional education focused on teaching Slovak as a second language? (items 8 and 10). Scientific assumption: Answers to items 8 and 10 are independent.
3. H0: What is the relationship between the completed type of professional education determined by Slovak language and literature teachers and the respondents' expectations. (items 8 and 13). Scientific assumption: Answers to items 8 and 13 are independent.

In order to evaluate the results of the relational research problem, contingency analysis was used (through contingency tables), which was used to evaluate the relationships between two nominal variables, and the Chi-square test of independence when analysing multi-field tables based on an Excel statistical file (Tirpáková, 2011).

2.2 Characteristics of respondents

The research sample consisted of Slovak language and literature teachers of the second grade of primary and secondary schools who taught Slovak as a foreign language. A purposive research sample was used because we aimed to obtain certain respondents who met the established criteria. 298 teachers were approached and 117 respondents participated in the research. Most responses were recorded from women (90.6%), and men accounted for 9.4% of the survey. The distribution of gender, age, years of teaching experience and career level is shown in Table 1. The largest group consisted of teachers over fifty years of age, 25.6%, and the lowest number of teachers was in the age range between 31-35, namely 9 teachers, which made up 7.7% of the total number. The most numerous groups of Slovak language and literature teachers who encountered Slovak as a second language were respondents aged 41-45, 21.4%. The implementation of the Slovak language and literature is significantly lower among younger teachers. In terms of length of teaching experience, the largest part of the respondents was a group of teachers with more than 20 years of experience with a percentage of 40.2%. The lowest number was made up of teachers with 6-10 years of experience, namely 9.4%. Majority of teachers were teaching staff with the 1st certification (41%), followed by teaching staff with the 2nd certification (35.9%), and beginning teaching staff did not participate in the survey (0%).

	Gender	**n %**
Table 1. Participants' socio-demographic characteristics (n = 117)	male female	9.4 % 90.6 %
	Age	**n %**
	Up to 30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 older than 50	8.5 % 7.7 % 17.1 % 21.4 % 19.7 % 25.6 %
	Pedagogical practice	n %
	1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 longer than 20	13.7 % 9.4 % 17.9 % 18.8 % 40.2 %
	Career level	n%
	beginner independent teacher with 1st attestation teacher with 2nd attestation	0 % 23.1 % 41 % 35.9 %

3 Results

The study is focused on indicators affecting individual relationships between two nominal variables related to the established research problem using the Pearson Chi-square statistic to evaluate independence tests. As part of the research, there were follow-up questions to hypotheses no. 3, 8 and 10 and 13. As part of finding out the relationships between the nominal variables, contingency tables, which were created using Excel were used.

A demographic quantitative indicator of the length of teaching experience was specified in the third question. The eighth item looked at whether Slovak language and literature teachers were in the framework of undergraduate education at the university sufficiently influenced the readiness to work with pupils with a different mother tongue. In the tenth question, we investigated the extent to which the respondents demonstrated the dominance of the current need to complete professional (further) education/educational activities focused on the Slovak language as a second language as one of the attributes of assistance in teaching pupils with a different mother tongue. Present situation was reflected in the item number thirteen: "Indicate your expectations from professional (further) education focused on the Slovak language as a second language". Considering the scope and goal of this paper, only questions that need to be analyzed and compared due to the formulated hypotheses and their verification have been selected.

3.1 Evaluation of the null hypothesis of items 3 and 10

Through research, the greatest dominance of the current need to complete professional (further) education/educational activities focused on the Slovak language as a foreign language (58.1%) as one of the attributes of assistance in teaching pupils with a different mother tongue was demonstrated within the tenth question. 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.

Focusing on the method of conducting the research, the results were subjected to a statistical analysis and a hypothesis was established as follows: H0: What is the relationship between the need to complete professional education focusing on the Slovak language as a second language and the length of teaching practice? (items 3 and 10). The value of the coefficient is approximately 0.1 (p=0.029), where 1 means perfect dependence and 0 rejects dependence. At a significance level of 0.1, the null hypothesis is not rejected because the contingency coefficient is statistically insignificant and our scientific assumption that the responses to items 3 and 10 are independent has been confirmed. The results of testing the formulated null hypothesis for items 3 and 10 are important. In our scientific assumption, it was assumed that there is a possible dependence between the educational need to complete professional education with an emphasis on Slovak as a second language and the length of pedagogical practice of Slovak language and literature teachers. However, the stated results indicate that teachers with a shorter period of experience may not feel the need to complete professional education focusing on the Slovak language as a second language. Based on the results, we conclude that there is no dependence between the need to complete some education focusing on the Slovak language as a second language and the length of teaching experience. It is therefore important to look for answers in further research.

Tab. 2: Chi-square test value for items 3 and 10.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	**Degree of freedom**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	17.126[a]	8	0.029
N of Valid Cases	117		
a. 6 cells (40,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.79			
Symmetric Measures			
		Value	**Significance**
Nominal by Nominal	Contingency coefficient	0.357	0.029
N of Valid Cases		117	

3.2 Evaluation of the null hypothesis of items 8 and 10

In the center of our interest was also the finding (item 8) whether Slovak language and literature teachers were sufficiently prepared to work with students whose mother tongue is other than Slovak as part of undergraduate education at the university. The question was constructed as semi-open, where the teachers could write either what helped them or what was absent in the preparation. Four teachers answered positively with a percentage of 3.4%. A negative answer was given by the majority of teachers of the Slovak language and literature (91.5%) that there was no subject at the university that would have paid attention to the Slovak language as a foreign language or the methodology of Slovak as a second language, or didactics focused on model situations or practice with an emphasis on Slovak language as a second language. At the same time, the methodology of how to work with pupils with a different mother tongue, what to teach them, ways and methods of teaching the subject matter was lacked.

When formulating the H0 hypothesis, we assumed that it is justified to think about the relationship between undergraduate training focused on teaching Slovak language and literature and the need for professional education focused on teaching Slovak as a second language. Again the results were subjected to statistical examination and the following hypothesis was established: H0 in items 8 and 10. The value of the coefficient is approximately 0.2 (p=0.178), where 1 means perfect dependence and 0 means independence. At a significance level of 0.1, the null hypothesis is not rejected. The measured contingency coefficient is statistically insignificant and the answers to questions 8 and 10 are independent. In our scientific assumption, it was assumed that there is a possible relationship between undergraduate training focused on the teaching of the Slovak language and literature and the need for professional education focused on the teaching of the Slovak language as a second language. The statistically determined results show that undergraduate preparation is not dependent on the need for professional education with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language. Based on the above, we can conclude that undergraduate training is not a determining factor in the need for professional development of a teacher of Slovak language and literature.

Tab. 3: Chi-square test value for items 8 and 10.

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	**degree of freedom**	**Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	6.300a	4	0.178
N of Valid Cases	117		
a. 6 cells (66,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,65..			
Symmetric Measures			
		Value	**Significance**
Nominal by Nomina	Contingency coefficient	0.226	0.178
N of Valid Cases		117	

3.3 Evaluation of the null hypothesis of items 8 and 13

Within the thirteenth item regarding expectations from professional (further) education focused on the Slovak language as a foreign language, teachers of the Slovak language and literature expressed that it is mainly an improvement in the quality of teaching focused on Slovak as a second language (67.5%). They have the lowest expectation for career growth (1.7%), which is an interesting result. In the mentioned item, they had the opportunity to enter other - their own answers, if they needed. Of them, the interesting answer is “all expectations”, which accounted for 0.9%.

Again, the results were subjected to a statistical analysis and established a hypothesis as follows: H0: What is the relationship between the type of professional education completed by the Slovak language and literature teacher and the respondents' expectations (items 8 and 13). The value of the coefficient is approximately 0.9 (p=0.932), where 1 means perfect dependence and 0 means independence. At a significance level of 0.9, the null hypothesis is rejected because the contingency coefficient is statistically significant, and our scientific assumption that the responses to items 8 and 13 are independent was not confirmed because they are dependent. The results of testing the formulated null hypothesis for items 8 and 13 are important. Based on the findings and our assumption, we

thought that there is a possible existence of a relationship of dependence between the completed type of professional education and the expectations of Slovak language and literature teachers. However, the stated results show us that we noticed a great dependence between expectations and the completed type of education focusing on the Slovak language as a second language. It is therefore understandable that from education intended for teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language, teachers mainly expect an improvement in the quality of teaching focused on the Slovak language as a second language.

Tab. 4: Chi-square test value for items 8 and 13

Chi-Square Test			
	Value	degree of freedom	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.325[a]	5	0.932
N of Valid Cases	117		
a. 8 cells (66.7%) have an expected number less than 5. The minimum number is 22.			
Symmetric Measures			
		Value	**Significance**
Nominal by Nomina	Contingency coefficient	0.106	0.932
N of Valid Cases		117	

From the results focused on the analysis of the educational needs of teachers of the Slovak language and literature with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a second language, the most significant ones were selected.

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 foreign language. In this contribution, we present the results of a questionnaire survey of the self-construction of selected items of Slovak language and literature teachers who implement the Slovak language as a foreign language in the educational process. From the achieved results 58.1%, 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 foreign language, regardless of the length of their teaching experience. Based on the evaluation of the null hypothesis (points 3 and 10), the facts are that there is no dependence between the need to complete an education focusing on the Slovak language as a second language and the length of teaching experience. The results of the research pointed to insufficient preparation of Slovak language and literature teachers for the realization of the educational process with an emphasis on teaching the Slovak language as a foreign language. The proof is the result of a questionnaire survey with a 91.5% negative response. At the same time, the analysis of the verification of the null hypothesis (items 8 and 10) pointed out that the undergraduate training of Slovak language and literature teachers was not decisive for the need for their professional development with an emphasis on the Slovak language as a foreign language.We consider the stated research conclusions to be a challenge in teaching 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. The need to increase the professional competence of teachers was also documented in the 2018 TALIS report, in which more than 50% of teachers in the countries expressed concern that they did not feel well prepared "for the challenges of a multicultural educational environment" and they were not confident in adapting their teaching to the cultural diversity of students (OECD, 2019, p. 98). The education of migrant pupils creates space for the support of intercultural and interlinguistic competences of teachers through the completion of educational programs and workshops.

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