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Education Experts : Agents of Contemporary Educational Discourse?

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Abstract: More and more experts from the social sciences are appearing in the media to provide expert opinions on media coverage of events and social issues. However, with regard to the conditions under which media content is produced, a growing number of voices have been pointing to the fact that quasi-experts with a media interest tend to speak more in the media than scientifically trained scholars. This article conducts an analysis of media outputs to examine whether this criticism is relevant to the field of education in the Czech media landscape, and the analysis shows that in almost half of cases the so-called "education experts" commenting on education in the media were quasi-experts – people to whom the authority and status to speak on education is attributed by the media – rather than scholarly experts. The analysis results in a classification of experts on education speaking in the Czech media – they usually choose similar rhetoric and accentuate only selected educational topics.

Keywords: expert, education expert, discourses in education, analysis of media outputs, media.

Introduction

In the times we live in, the mass media have become a regular part of our lives. Although we might struggle to quantify the extent to which the media actually influence our lives, there is a general consensus that their influence is quite significant (e.g., Potter, 2012). The media are credited with influencing public opinion, but also with shaping our knowledge, thereby determining how we should understand the world around us (Lippmann, 2015; McCombs, 2009; McQuail, 2016; Potter, 2012). Some refer to the

media as "agenda setters," by which they imply that the media influence both what we talk about and what topics we should pay attention to and thus identify as relevant (McCombs, 2009).

The importance of the media is also underscored by the fact that they are discussed as a social institution exercising symbolic power (McQuail, 2007; Valenta, 2017). This stems from their ability to reach a large group of people in a short period of time and share with them purposefully selected content through which norms are determined, social realities are interpreted, and social change is instituted. The media also make selected personalities visible (McQuail et al., 2007). Given their power, the media and the journalists engaged in its main activities are subject to some control, where they are required to follow specific rules adopted by journalism as an institution (McQuail, 2016).

In the public interest, journalists are expected to produce news that is socially relevant, independent, truthful, and objective, which are requirements that may not be easy to meet within a short time frame. This is one of the underlying reasons why journalists turn to experts for comments or interviews – the expectation is that the experts will be neutral, which should ensure that the above principles are upheld (Albæk, 2011; McChesney, 2009; McQuail, 2016). The credibility that experts lend to journalists through their commentary has resulted in journalists becoming de facto dependent on expert opinions. On the one hand, they cannot develop their content sufficiently unless they refer to a particular expertise, and on the other hand, the publication of their reports occurs almost simultaneously with the event they are covering, which leaves them no time to conduct their own research to support the principle of objectivity without necessary collaboration with an expert (Albæk, 2011). This is one of the main reasons for the increasing number of experts appearing in the media space (Albæk, Christiansen & Togeby, 2003).

The predicament is that mass media by their very nature address the masses, which is why they necessarily use language that is easily comprehensible to a heterogeneous audience. Add to this the fact that media content tends to be constrained by time, subject matter, and the journalist him/herself who is directly called upon to produce this content (Bourdieu, 2002), it follows that media discourse is not particularly compatible with scientific discourse. Even though media discourse strongly differs from the scientific one, the media present us daily with expertise and interviews with all kinds of experts. Perhaps as a result, voices have begun to highlight the fact that a certain number of experts are called on repeatedly to appear in

the media, who should not be described as experts in the proper sense of the word, but they should rather be called quasi-experts whose media interest outweighs their expertise (Bourdieu, 2002).

Given that the public places considerable weight on expert evaluation (Page, Shapiro & Dempsey, 1987), it is entirely appropriate to investigate whether the label *expert* has become vulgarised in the media and to analyse the discourses these speakers enact through their commentary. This study addresses these critical voices: First, it specifically verifies which experts speak about educational issues in the Czech media, and then it analyses how these experts speak about educational issues. On these grounds, the following research questions were set: *What types of education experts appearing in the Czech media can be identified? What types of discourses on education do the identified education experts represent?*

Media Coverage of Educational Issues

Education is one of the most highly most publicly discussed areas of society, which is no doubt supported by the fact that the issue of education affects everyone to some extent. It is very important to examine how the media report on education, because the way in which they talk about education greatly influences not only public opinion on educational issues (Baker, 1994; Lippmann, 2015) but also which of these issues politicians identify as important (Baker, 1994). A number of studies have focused on the issue of the media coverage of selected educational topics – for example, examining how teachers and their preparation for the profession are discussed in the media (Edling & Liljestrand, 2020; Hargreaves, Cunningham, Hansen, McIntyre & Oliver, 2007), how education policy issues are covered in the media and what educational discourses appear in the media during political campaigns (Cabalin, 2015; Carr-Chellman, 2018; Gerstl-Pepin, 2002), how the media report on the results of national exams (Murphy, 2013), etc. Although these are very diverse types of studies, they broadly agree in their conclusion that the media tend to report on education in a negative, simplistic, and politicised manner, resulting in simplistic perceptions of educational issues by the public, even though these issues are in fact much more complex.

In the Czech media, educational issues are most often discussed by people referred to as “education experts.” Danish research from 2003 showed that social scientists were making statements in the media significantly more than before: specifically, the number of social scientists

increased more than twentyfold between 1961 and 2001 (Albæk et al., 2003, p. 942). This is very likely related to the fact that the argument for their statements has changed. In 1961, in general, when experts appeared in the media it was much more often in connection with research activities, whereas from 1981 onwards, experts started to speak more about political issues or other topics that have the potential to engage the public (Albæk et al., 2003). Such topics also include educational issues, so we can assume that the number of experts specialising in the field of education is also increasing in the media domain.

The criteria by which journalists choose their (expert) sources are not well researched. While there are studies that address the nature of interactions between journalists and experts (Albæk, 2011), the bulk of these studies focus on interactions between journalists and experts in the hard or medical sciences (e.g., Larsson, Appel, Sundberg & Rosenqvist, 2019). The way journalists select experts in the social sciences (and specifically in education) is a rather neglected topic among researchers. One exception is a study by Joachim Allgaier (2011) that investigated whether a journalist's specialisation influences which sources he or she chooses for their content. It turned out that journalists focusing on education most often choose the sources that are "closest" to the issue – i.e., if journalists report on a situation related to a specific school, they most often turn to principals, teachers, parents, students at the school in question or to representatives of teachers' unions. If they are reporting on a topic related to education policy, they address the Ministry of Education, specific politicians, or other government institutions. In contrast, journalists specialising in science reporting most often turn to scientists, and, in the given case studied, these journalists also considered education policymakers as relevant sources (Allgaier, 2011).

The results that emerged from J. Allgaier's (2011) study suggest that journalists who focus on education identify as relevant a range of sources, who, it can be assumed, may possess varying (even very low) degrees of expertise, while at the same time they completely bypass academics conducting educational research, who, on the contrary, can be expected to demonstrate a high level of expertise. It is therefore appropriate to ask what criteria journalists reporting on education use to assess the expertise of the experts they interview and who they ultimately label as education experts. Central to the present study is the assumption that an education expert featured in the media can essentially be anyone who is identified as such in the media. That is, a speaker's actual expertise does not necessarily determine whether he or she is given space in the media to provide expert

assessments of educational issues – a point that has been made by authors such as Eric Hass (2007), Erik Hass, Alex Molnar, and Rafael Serrano (2002), Konrad Paul Liessmann (2015), Philip Kovacs (2008), and Stanislav Štech (2016, 2021).

The Expert on Education: A Media Figure Influencing Contemporary Discourse on Education

The term *expert* is derived from the Latin word *expertus,* meaning "experienced" (Rejzek, 2015). An expert is defined as a person with a high level of knowledge or skill related to a particular subject or activity (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), while some interpretations also emphasise that an expert is someone who is considered an authority (e.g., Oxford University Press, n.d.).

In the English-language professional literature, the concept of expert is closely related to the concepts of *expertise* and *expert performance.* Expertise refers to "the characteristics, skills, and knowledge that distinguish experts from novices and less experienced people" (Ericsson et al., 2018, p. 3), and *expert performance* refers to "superior reproducible performances of representative tasks capture the essence of the respective domains" (Ericsson et al., 2018, pp. 3–4). In simple terms, this means that every expert must necessarily possess expertise and subsequently demonstrate this through their expert performance. K. Anders Ericsson, Michael J. Prietul, and Edward T. Cokely (2007) explored this fact further and argued that experts can only be considered true experts if their performance consistently exceeds that of their peers, if they achieve specific outcome as a result of their expertise, and if their expertise can be replicated and measured under laboratory conditions. This can only be achieved if the individual in question possesses professional education and professional experience (Jandourek, 2001).

Michelene T. H. Chi (2006), based on an analysis of the research conducted on expertise, identified seven characteristics that can be generalised to apply to experts in different fields:

1. experts generate only the best, even when they are limited by time, and at the same time, they are more accurate and quicker in their solutions than novices;
2. experts detect and recognise features that novices do not see;
3. experts spend a lot of time on qualitative problem analysis while expanding domain-specific problems to include partial and general constraints;

4. experts are much more accurate in their self-monitoring, which means they are more aware of where they have made mistakes and what level of comprehension they have reached;
5. experts can choose adequate strategies or procedures in situations that arise;
6. experts are able to draw on all available resources in dealing with situations;
7. experts can acquire knowledge in their domain with minimal cognitive effort and, conversely, can exert more cognitive effort when it is desirable for their current performance. In addition, they can perform specific tasks with greater automation.

The expertise of experts is always limited to a selected domain (Chi, 2006), i.e., experts do not excel compared to novices in areas in which they do not have theoretical, research, or practical experience. In the case of educational science, it is not so easy – given the different concepts of educational science (in national and international contexts) – to define who is an expert in this field. What is also challenging is that educational science is made up of a set of disciplines, at the centre of which always figures a specific object of investigation. It reflects the extent of "educational reality," which in the most general terms can be considered the subject of educational science (Průcha, 2013). Thus, for the purposes of this study, I will define an expert in educational science as a person who possesses expertise on the level of the theory and in educational research. It will also be significant whether the person in question is recognised by his or her colleagues in the field as an expert in the chosen area. The highly normative nature of educational science cannot be overlooked, which is why teachers and school principals are also considered to be experts in education (more precisely, experts in educational practice). For the sake of clarity, I will refer to an educational expert defined as an "expert-scholar."

However, it is not only expert-scholars who shape discourses in education. In recent years in particular we can observe that the shape of contemporary pedagogic discourse is strongly influenced by people who speak in the media, and are usually referred to as experts on education, but who, typically, do not possess the necessary qualities of expert-scholars, and, at the same time, to whom authority and status are attributed not by experts but by the media themselves through the attention they receive (Liessmann, 2015; Štech, 2016). This means, therefore, that they are essentially "quasi-experts," who tend frequently to provide interviews and commentaries on educational issues and are misrepresented by the media

as expert-scholars. In the Czech educational environment, we do not have many theoretical works that deal with the issue of experts on education in more detail – with the exception of the publications by Stanislav Štech (2016, 2021) and Petr Najvar (2014).

There is not only one type of quasi-expert in education. S. Štech, for example, defines two kinds of quasi-expert (2016): The first kind are the so-called "intellectuals without boundaries," characterised by the fact that they comment on virtually whatever they are asked about, thus exploiting the authority acquired in a particular field to lend credibility to statements on matters outside their expertise. The other type of quasi-expert is the so-called "informed dilettante," typically represented by an employee of an educational NGO or someone with experience running a very specific educational institution. The informed dilettante, on the one hand, very often lacks professional training or direct or research-based experience in the field of education, and on the other hand, they are usually unable to distinguish scientific knowledge from appealing information, and their statements are thus often simplistic and inconsistent (Štech, 2016). According to Petr Najvar, the informed dilettantes are most often educated journalists, who lack the ability to abstract beyond common sense in a given field, and it is they whom most often find hiding behind the media label of experts (2014).

We can only debate the motives that prompt quasi-experts to appear in the media. Pierre Bourdieu (2002) points out that despite the relative impossibility of having something of substance to communicate on television, there is a number of speakers who show up on TV daily without questioning whether they have anything to say to the public. As a rule, these speakers appear on television for the sake of drawing media attention to themselves, without having anything of value to say. Bourdieu concludes that television has ceased to be a vehicle for information and values and has become more of a means of fulfilling the narcissistic needs of the figures who appear on TV. Quasi-experts most certainly derive some profit from their media appearances, either in the form of money or influence (Albæk et al., 2003). However, it cannot be ignored that in the area of education, it is their public appearances that shape society's perceptions of educational issues (Liessmann, 2015) and the supposed needs, objectives, or ideals that are relevant or essential to the field of education.

Quasi-experts can also be considered relatively influential actors in education policies (Gardinier, 2021; Kalous & Veselý, 2006; Liessmann, 2015; Lingard, 2016; Štech, 2016). For one thing, politicians consider to a much greater extent than before the media-mediated public opinion,

which is already influenced by quasi-experts (Štech, 2016), but these quasi-experts frequently end up as direct advisors to politicians and ministers, through whom they can advocate their beliefs (Liessmann, 2015). A. Carr-Chellman (2018) found that 1,000 speakers commented on education issues in the US mainstream media in a specified fourteen-day period during the election campaign that was part of the nomination of Betsy DeVos to serve as Secretary of Education in the Donald Trump administration. However, she identified only nine of them as having sufficient expertise in education. The remaining speakers came from the ranks of politicians or pundits[1], and the discussion they engaged in was political and divorced from the real issues of education. The results of the research suggest that the voices of quasi-experts, often with demonstrable political connections, are very loud.

A number of authors have specifically focused their studies on quasi-experts working in think tanks, who also happen to enjoy significant media interest, while they also have a strong influence on education policy (Haas, 2007; Haas et al., 2002; Kovacs, 2008; Yettick, 2009, etc.). Studies have found that the media quite automatically label think-tank staff as *experts, researchers, scientists/scholars,* or *policy analysts,* even though they often do not conduct scientific research themselves and their level of expertise varies widely (Haas, 2007; McDonald, 2013). Thus, the *policy expert,* and more specifically the figure of a quasi-expert, is essentially a new type of policy practitioner (Lingard, 2016), one who does not necessarily possess professional expertise (Haas et al, 2002). The media ascribes scientific authority to subjects who do not fulfil the definition of such an authority, resulting in a transformation of the perception of what is considered scientific research (Lingard, 2016; McDonald, 2013). This has been criticised, for example, by P. Kovacs (2008), who refers to many think-tank workers as neo-intellectuals, whose main activity is to promote neoliberal or neoconservative policies and thus become the willing tools of power and big economic interests.

Analyses also show that media outputs do not include background information about quasi-experts, and thus media's recipients cannot judge the credibility of the speaker in relation to the topic being covered from the context alone (Haas, 2007; Haas et al., 2002; Molnar, 2001; Yettick, 2009). This can be misleading to say the least, given that, for example, research by E. Hasse (2007) showed that the news media do not distinguish whether they source their information from think-tank models – a contract research model, an academic or advocacy model, or a mixture of both – where

[1] This corresponds to what P. Najvar referred to as the "informed dilettante" (2014).

employees can be assumed to have varying degrees of expertise. Thus, in most cases, the news media consider the information they disseminate to be credible and research-validated, regardless of whether the standards of scientific research were met. It appears that the news media prefer the advocacy think-tank model over the academic model as their source (Yettick, 2009). Media support is quite crucial for think tanks of this type. Without this support, think tanks would not be able to distribute ideologically loaded ideas so effectively, which in the end greatly influence a country's politics (Haas et al., 2002; Lingard, 2016).

Finally, quasi-experts typically believe that "the current education system is the worst imaginable and that only a fundamental educational revolution can avert the imminent catastrophe" (Liessmann, 2015). These quasi-experts tend to accuse schools of being an institution that stifles talent and creativity in children and of not adequately preparing children for the needs of the labour market and for their future lives (Liessmann, 2015; Štech, 2016). These beliefs are quite logically reflected in the quasi-experts' rhetoric and media self-presentation, so if we want to truly understand the language of quasi-experts, we need to analyse the discourse in which their speeches take place.

It is characteristic of pedagogical thinking that it is represented by a variety of different theories, which are based on specific value settings that influence how the proponents of each theory interpret and speak about education – in other words, within which discourse their comments are framed (Kaščák & Pupala, 2009; Strouhal, 2013). The notion of discourse in the present text draws on Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse, where discourse is shaped by a set of specific rules that determine what and in what way something can (not) be said at a given time and in a given discursive field – in this case, the field of education (Foucault, 2016). Thus, a discourse is "a group of utterances that belong to a single system of formation" (Foucault, 2016, p. 165). This means, therefore, that in the background of the utterances of individual speakers expressing themselves in the Czech media environment, we can identify different types of discourses in education[2].

[2] On the issue of educational discourses, reference can be made to the publication by Ondrej Kaščák and Branislav Pupala, *Výchova a vzdelávanie v základných diskurzech,* who analysed statements related to educational thinking, from which they defined humanistic discourse, functional discourse, interactional discourse, reconstructionist discourse, consensual discourse, and neoliberal discourse. Roman Švaříček's article *Konec pedagogiky : kritický esej* is also an inspiring source that identifies three pedagogical discourses that inherently threaten

Methodology

Objectives and Research Questions

Even in the case of the Czech media, the issue of education is widely discussed, but we do not have a study that would identify who speaks about educational issues in the Czech media and how. The present study is a response to this gap, and therefore its main purpose is to document who talks about education in the Czech media and how, with the following sub-objectives:

1. to analyse whether the Czech media is dominated more by expert-scholars or quasi-experts;
2. to identify the types of education experts that appear in the Czech media[3] and the discourses they represent.

Based on the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

- What types of education experts appearing in the Czech media can be identified?
- What types of discourses in education do the identified education experts represent?

Characteristics of the Data Set

The present study is centred on an analysis of mass media outputs, and the data were collected using the *Anopress IT*[4] database of Czech media, which contains media messages published in print and on television, the radio, the internet, and on social networks. The keywords used to search the database were *expert on education, education expert, school expert,* or

educational science: the discourse of evidence, the discourse of practical research, and the discourse of technology. These typologies were based on a data analysis.

[3] Although the terms expert-scholar and quasi-expert have been used in the text so far, the research investigation proceeded to adopt the term "educational expert" appearing in the Czech media, which de facto includes the terms expert-scholar and quasi-expert. The aim was to eliminate the assumption that one of the types of experts prevails in the media. An education expert appearing in the Czech media is anyone who has been identified by the media as an expert on education, an education expert, a school expert, or a learning expert.

[4] The database is available here: https://www.anopress.cz/ (2014).

learning expert. The analysis focused on a five-year time period between 1 February 2015 and 1 February 2020.

The database generated a total of 1,895 media outputs. Content published on social networks, identical content (e.g., one media text was published in print and online), and texts published on personal blogs or servers focusing on education issues were excluded (the purpose being to select only media content targeting the public). Also excluded was content in which the experts on education are not speaking directly but their statements are being interpreted, or content in which the keyword was only mentioned in brief. As a result, 190 media outputs were analysed.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The main method used in the present study is the analysis of mass media outputs (Hendl, 2005), which includes all mass media outputs containing the keywords in question. The most frequently analysed outputs were Internet articles.

The generated media outputs were first screened and selected according to the above-mentioned criteria. A data analysis was carried out on three levels:

1. first, a list of education experts appearing in the Czech media was created – and even at this stage attention was paid to the topics on which individual speakers commented. This phase was followed by an analysis of the experts' biographies, which produced the first categories, and these were then further refined.
2. The statements of individual speakers were divided into smaller thematic units, which gave an overview of which speakers emphasised a given topic and in which media outlet the topic appeared. The individual topics were further analysed with the intention of identifying sub-themes and the frequency of their occurrence.
3. The final analysis summarised the findings of the previous levels and identified the characteristics of the individual categories of experts on education that appear in the Czech media.

Results

The data showed that in the selected time period, there were 42 speakers in the Czech media who were identified by the media as *experts on education,*

education experts, school experts, or *learning experts.* From an analysis of mass media outputs, the following categories were determined:

1. Political experts and politically engaged experts on education.
2. Experts pursuing economic and corporate interests.
3. Experts-entrepreneurs.
4. Experts highlighting technology and digitalisation in education.
5. Expert reformers.
6. Conservative experts.
7. Expert scholars.

Table 1: The data presented here show how many speakers represent each category, the number of statements in each category, and how many speakers were credited with expertise.

Categories of experts on education appearing in the Czech media	Number of speakers	Number of statements	Expertise		
			Professional education	Professional experience	Professional education and professional experience
Political experts and politically engaged experts on education	15	52	7	12	7[5]
Experts pursuing economic and corporate interests	8	32	0[6]	5	0
Experts-entrepreneurs	4	17	1	2	1
Experts highlighting technology and digitalisation in education	4	51	2	4	2
Expert reformers	9	103	5	5	4
Conservative experts	2	22	1	2	1
Expert scholars	8	11	7	8	7

5 In one case, it was not possible to trace the necessary information.
6 In one case, the level of education was not traced.

The categories were created based on an analysis of the statements and the professional resumes of the individual speakers, and the resumes were analysed with the intention of determining their level of expertise (professional education, professional experience) or identifying other activities that could have an impact on the categorisation of educational experts appearing in the Czech media.

A professional education was considered to be the completion of at least a bachelor's degree in teaching, education, or other educational sciences, and professional experience was considered to be any experience as an educator (at any level, including tertiary) or as an employee of the Czech Ministry of Education.

In some cases, other variables – such as political or professional activities – also influenced the categorisation of experts. The content of the resumes varied widely and in two cases, it was not possible to retrieve the necessary information. Some speakers were included in more than one category because of the diversity of their statements or professional activities.

Political Experts and Politically Engaged Experts on Education

> *"As Civic Democrats, we have a straightforward solution to this problem by advocating for an increase in teacher salaries so that they move toward 150% of the average salary, and we also want more powers for principals to be able to provide raises to above-average teachers[7]."*

This category – political experts and politically engaged experts on education – includes speakers who have experience as education experts within political parties and speakers who are otherwise politically active. In terms of the number of speakers, this is the largest category, i.e., a significant number of education experts speaking in the Czech media are politically engaged, which corresponds with the findings of A. Carr-Chellman (2018).

These experts are characterised by the way they politicise educational topics that politicians have identified as important. Topics typically had to do with formulating amendments and laws, specific topics such as teachers' pay raises, the state high school exit exam (specifically the state math exam), employer concerns, the employability of graduates in the labour market, inclusion, and the shaping of educational content. In addition to all this,

7 This statement by M. Baxa (Vančová 2019) is an example of how political opinions are reflected in the statements of these experts.

many representatives of this category are typically also observed to make boundless wide-ranging comments on anything that journalists ask about, i.e., where expertise or professional interest do not play a major role in their statements[8], much like the *informed dilettante* type of expert (Najvar, 2014; Štech, 2016).

This group represents the neoliberal discourse on education [9] (cf. Kaščák & Pupala, 2009). Their statements quite understandably reflect the political beliefs or positions of the parties they represent, so it can be assumed that political or economic interests are behind their statements. The topics they focus on in their statements relate to legislative changes under (political) debate, and their primary sources include political documents. While it is not possible to determine from the data how much influence these experts had on the current discourse on education and whether politicians are taking their voices more into account, given that a certain number of these speakers speak from the position of high-ranking politician, we can assume that they do have an influence. The risk associated with this group of experts lies in their high profile, loquaciousness, and often lack of expertise.

Experts Pursuing Economic and Corporate Interests

> *"The education system has not yet taken note of the significant changes in the nature of work itself over the years ahead, and for the most part is still preparing a new workforce for a status quo that no longer exists[10]."*

This category is represented by individuals who promote economic or specifically corporate interests through their statements. They are characterised by the appeals they direct at schools to prepare graduates for the needs of the labour market. None of the experts in this group had any expertise, but two representatives had extensive theoretical and research

8 For example, V. Klaus, Jr., the most media active political expert, commented on education in 21 cases on 12 topics.

9 Neoliberal discourse is influenced by political and ideological interests, and its basic ideas are distributed through texts produced in the political arena. Its ideological base is neoliberalism, which is reflected in a desire to produce graduates who are capable of succeeding in the labour market, in demands for educational content that neglects knowledge and instead emphasises general competences, or in an emphasis on lifelong learning (Kaščák & Pupala, 2009).

10 This statement by B. Kartous, (Dostál, 2019, p. 8) is an example of what criticism of the Czech education system as disconnected from the labour market can look like.

experience in the field of the economics of education, as well as practical professional experience acquired from university teaching.

Experts pursuing economic and corporate interests sharply criticise schools as an institution for their obsolescence and disconnect from the labour market, and they are also convinced that schools do not produce graduates prepared to take into account the needs of the labour market and that educational content should be formulated with regard to its purpose; they also typically demand that schools educate students for the future, but they do not specify what this means. Some representatives specifically advocated for the vocationalisation of higher education, there was a call for close cooperation between companies and universities, but consideration was also given to the question of whether it was effective for the economy of the country to have young people attain more than a bachelor's degree.

Against the backdrop of these experts' statements, we can again identify a neoliberal discourse (cf. Kaščák & Pupala, 2009). Neoliberalist principles are even more evident here: students are considered entities that need to succeed in the labour market and thus win the competition that characterises that market. In the case of tertiary education, there is even a belief that should be tied to labour market needs. The subjects taught in schools should be selected with a view to their usefulness. These are all ideas that contribute to a change in the way education is viewed, where it is often seen as a product whose form should be determined by market demand, resulting in a technicist form of education.

Experts Entrepreneurs

> *"In many public schools, children are treated without respect, in a sort of wholesale manner, without considering the educational needs of the individual, which is even mandated by school law. The main motivation is grades, even bad ones, and they stress children unnecessarily, ignoring their inherent needs. It's as if the goal is to lick the kids into shape – that's what some parents really want, but it's exactly what those interested in ScioSchool wish to avoid[11]."*

This category included individuals involved in the education industry (namely the founders of private schools and non-governmental educational institutions) who are given the opportunity to speak in the media as experts on educational matters. These experts typically have expert experience that

[11] This statement by O. Šteffl (Mach, 2018) demonstrates how expert-entrepreneurs can criticise public schools while praising the institutions they themselves founded.

they acquired in the institution they founded (except for one representative in this group).

The founding of schools or non-governmental educational companies, which can essentially be described as elite institutions given the level of the tuition fees or the prices for the services they provide, is a characteristic of expert-entrepreneurs [12]. At the same time, these institutions promise alternative or innovative methods of education. Their statements share a critical view of public education, which is accompanied by praise for schools that implement a curriculum with alternative elements, and it is not unusual for these experts to champion the institutions that they have founded and to which they attribute exclusively positive characteristics.

In the background of the statements made by expert-entrepreneurs, there is to some extent a mixture of humanistic[13] and neoliberal discourses (cf. Kaščák & Pupala, 2009). The elements of humanistic discourse can be seen primarily in the criticism of the mainstream education and in the praise of institutions that are described as modern, alternative institutions that lead students towards comprehensive (self)improvement and as institutions that better meet the needs of both individuals and society. The elements of neoliberal discourse are observed in the fact that the newly founded institutions represent an alternative to mainstream education and promote individual choice for pupils and their common vision is to prepare students who will succeed in the 21st century.

The media's turning for comment to education entrepreneurs, whom they also label as experts, can be a can be risky. The public has very limited means to assess whether the criticism of mainstream education by these experts is relevant or whether business interests are behind their talk. The media thereby (intentionally or unintentionally) promote the institutions of the entrepreneurs who are being addressed, thus increasing the credibility of their statements.

[12] The selected institutions also specifically target foreign clientele.

[13] Humanistic discourse is characterised by a human-centric orientation. Humans are seen as inherently good and fully responsible for their life. The essence of this discourse is therefore the pursuit of the maximum development, or self-development, of the individual, which is in line with the assumption that everyone is capable of self-regulation, given the right conditions. The aim of education is to shape an environment in which a person's individuality will form naturally (Kaščák & Pupala, 2009).

Experts Highlighting Technology and Digitalisation in Education

> *"Teachers need to be able to work with digital technologies in a similar way that they are used outside of school[14]."*

It is typical for representatives of this category to promote digitalisation in education through their comments. The analysis of the speeches showed that a common feature of this group of experts is their belief that information and communication technology (ICT) is an essential educational tool for the 21st century. Consequently, they demand that teachers should use digital technologies in their teaching to motivate their students to acquire *digital literacy*. These experts are convinced that this does not happen routinely in schools, and they therefore describe schools as outdated institutions that do not reflect technological advances and scientific developments.

This group of experts represents technological discourse[15]. These experts also typically engage in the unreflective promotion of ICT in education and criticism of the school for its outdated status. At the same time, the analysis revealed that this group of experts does not refer to research studies that would provide evidence that ICT in education leads to a more effective learning process or more effective teaching. Therefore, we can conclude that this group of experts' interventions are guided by faith rather than empirical findings, which is the greatest risk associated with this group.

Expert Reformers

> *"Society has changed and continues to change; the education system is trying to improvise within its limits, but it is increasingly losing ground. In a time of rapid change, innovation, and digital technology, you can't get away with teaching 20-year-old content using 30-year-old teaching methods![16]"*

Expert reformers are those speakers whose statements are characterised by criticism of Czech education or calls for its reform. In terms of the number of interventions, this is the loudest group. Characteristic of the individual

[14] Statement B. Brdička (Keményová, 2016, p. 1) shows how important it is for this group of experts that teachers use ICT in teaching.

[15] The essence of the technology discourse is the complacent and unreflected acceptance of ICT in education. This is linked to the belief that ICT mediates full learning not limited by content, space, or time. This often leads to a situation where ICT is implemented into teaching with absolute self-evidence, without reliably fulfilling the stated learning objectives (Švaříček, 2013).

[16] The statement of M. Hřebecký (Rychlík, Těšínská, 2018) is an example of the rhetoric adopted by expert reformers.

figures is that almost all of them work either in non-governmental educational organisations or at alternative or innovative schools.

Expert reformers accuse mainstream schools of being outdated and ossified, and they presumably therefore advocate alternative schools and methods in education. They also argue that mainstream education does not prepare students for their future lives, does not purposefully develop their creativity and talents and does not sufficiently let them develop their personalities. Some also believe that schools do not prepare students for the needs of the labour market. Expert reformers are the type of education experts who most closely match the characteristics of a quasi-expert as described by K. P. Liessmann (2015) or S. Štech (2016).

Expert reformers can undoubtedly be described as employing humanistic discourse (cf. Kaščák & Pupala, 2009). In their statements, they emphasise the individuality of students, demand that their personality be allowed to evolve freely, and call specifically for the cultivation of students' individual creativity and talent. According to them, educational content does not reflect the needs of the contemporary world and ignores the immediate experience of students. At the same time, individual expert reformers are convinced that the mainstream education is in urgent need of reform to ensure that graduates leave school competent and ready to face the challenges of the contemporary world.

Since expert reformers are the most powerful group in the media, their contribution to shaping societal perceptions of education can be expected to be significant. Their preferred rhetoric supports the notion that Czech public education is in a state of disaster. The question therefore is whether the interventions of these experts could generate a growing interest among the Czech public in forms of education that fall more into the realm of alternative education, as indicated by data from the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI, 2022), and whether the rejection of mainstream education is not ultimately gaining momentum.

Conservative Experts

> *"The fact that some sick children go to school with healthy ones, we don't need the foreign word 'inclusion' for that. That's an act of common human decency (…) but the fact that we are indiscriminately herding children with mental disabilities into regular schools, where, instead of a specialist, we*

put an 18-year-old assistant with a 14-day course with them, that's a crime against these children[17]."

The remarks of conservative experts reflect the speakers' conservative attitudes speakers and their reluctance to accept changes in education.

Almost all the statements in this category were made by a speaker who also falls into the category of a political expert on education. Thus, his statements reflected to some extent his political beliefs and interests. His way of expressing himself was characterised by generalisation, criticalness, rejectionism, and subjectivity. The other representative of this category spoke in the media in only one instance, so it is not possible to generalise his statements, but his remarks in this one instance reflected a rejectionist attitude towards inclusion.

The statements made by this group of experts to some extent represent a form of consensual discourse. (cf. Kaščák & Pupala, 2009). Their statements reflect their conservative positions and their opposition to innovations in education. However, these experts did not primarily put an emphasis on classical education, which is otherwise typical of consensus discourse. Thus, their comments did not directly imply that innovations in education should be rejected because they represent a threat to the traditional form of schooling, but they criticised all attempts at change and considered them burdensome, confusing, or ineffective. The dangers of this group lie in their radicalism, in their dissemination of untruths or half-truths, and in their rejection of change. Through their ideologically loaded commentaries, they could end up preserving systems that are already outdated or that need to be replaced. In this case, it is also troublesome that the main protagonist in this category is politically active and as such receives a lot of media attention.

Expert Scholars

"For example, in the 2016 PIRLS reading literacy survey of fourth-graders, the Moravian-Silesian region is at a similar level as the Ústí nad Labem region, and in the TIMSS survey of mathematical skills among

[17] This statement by V. Klaus, Jr., (Štíchová, Brunclíková, 2017) demonstrates the conservative positions of expert reformers and the rhetoric they use to arouse emotions.

fourth-graders, the Pilsen region is also among the regions with below-average results[18].”

This category included those who, with some exceptions, fulfilled the criteria for expertise as defined above[19]. At first glance, the category appears to be well represented, but in terms of the number of media appearances, it is the group of experts that speaks the least in the Czech media.

Expert scholars are characterised by their profound expertise: they have both professional education and professional experience, and they are also affiliated with a university. They typically speak on topics that are not outside the scope of their expertise or research interest, and their talk is mostly based on empirical arguments. In the period under review, they usually commented on research that they had conducted or commented on the findings of other researchers. Although it was also possible to identify speakers in the previous categories who possessed both professional training and professional experience, they were not included in this category either because of their political activity (in which case it is very difficult to determine whether they were acting more as experts or as politicians in the media), or because their professional experience was not very extensive, or because their comments were ideologically loaded or showed noticeable signs of superficiality.

The discourse of expert scholars is not characterised by any specific beliefs in the way the discourse in other categories is. This group shares a similar mode of expression grounded in expert argumentation. At the same time, the low frequency of statements by expert scholars in the media is the greatest liability of this group.

Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years, we have seen a rapid increase in social science experts speaking in the media (Albæk et al., 2003). However, given the conditions under which media content is produced, there are increasing numbers of voices pointing to the fact that the media space is dominated by quasi-experts with an interest in the media rather than expert scholars (e.g.,

[18] This statement by J. Straková (Hronová, 2019) shows how expert-scholars use scientifically informed arguments.

[19] One speaker has a psychology background but has commented in the media on educational-psychological issues and meets other characteristics of this type; the other speaker has a background in public and social policies, but his professional research interests are in education policy and the sociology of education.

Bourdieu, 2002), which many argue is a trend that is also visible in the field of education (Hass, 2007; Kovacs, 2008; Liessmann, 2015; Štech, 2016, 2021). In the Czech educational environment, we do not have any available study that would verify this fact.

The present study is conceived on the assumption that virtually anyone can become an expert on education in the media as long as they are identified as such by the media. Therefore, expertise does not necessarily have an impact on whether a person speaks in the media. Based on this assumption, the categories of expert scholar and so-called quasi-expert were defined. A quasi-expert does not satisfy the original meaning of the word "expert" – on the contrary, it is typical of quasi-experts that they are attributed with authority and status by the media (Liessmann, 2015; Štech, 2016), that they tend to be a relatively influential actor in education policies (Gardinier, 2021; Kalous & Veselý, 2006; Liessmann, 2015; Lingard, 2016; Štech, 2016), and that they tend to be a vocal critic of public education (Liessmann, 2015). The study found that in the period under review a total of 42 voices were speaking about education in the Czech media and these voices were identified by the media as *experts on education, education experts, school experts,* or *learning experts.* Of these, a total of 20 speakers did not have professional education, professional experience, or either of these. This means that almost half of the of the people who were talking about education in the media can be regarded as quasi-experts, who did not have the credentials and status required to be experts. However, it is also significant that the degree of expertise of individual voices varies considerably because of the rather broad definition of expertise.

The analysis revealed that education experts appearing in the Czech media usually highlight certain topics and adopt similar rhetoric, which made it possible for this study to define seven types of experts: *political experts and politically engaged education experts, experts pursuing economic and corporate interests, expert-entrepreneurs, experts highlighting technology and digitalisation in education, expert reformers, conservative experts,* and *expert scholars.* Pedagogical thinking is characterised by a multiplicity of discourses, within which there is a singular interpretation of pedagogical reality (Kaščák & Pupala, 2009; Strouhal, 2013); therefore, different types of discourses in education can be identified in the statements of individual speakers, and it is in the hands of the media alone which discourses they allow to be heard.

The analysis also showed that the most frequent speakers in the Czech media are *expert reformers.* A total of 103 statements by them were recorded,

which is significantly more compared to the other categories. After them, the most frequent speakers were *political and politically engaged education experts,* from whom 52 statements were recorded, which is 51 fewer than the *expert reformers.* This significant difference demonstrates that *expert reformers* clearly dominate the Czech media, and, as a result, schools are often described in the media as outdated and rigid institutions that do not prepare students for the needs of the 21st century or as institutions that squander students' potential (Liessmann, 2015; Štech, 2016). When the public is repeatedly exposed to primarily pro-reform "expert judgments," it is hard to avoid the impression that public education is in a catastrophic state that can only be remedied through radical reform. By contrast, *expert scholars,* who could shed greater light on such statements, speak the least in the Czech media. Only 11 contributions from them were identified.

When it comes to discussions about education, the Czech media is a domain that is dominated by the voices of individuals from the ranks of quasi-experts, who most often represent the neoliberal or humanist discourse on education (cf. Kaščák & Pupala, 2009). The *Annual Report of the Czech School Inspectorate* in 2021/2022 showed that there is an increasing demand from parents for private schools, but also an increasing number of people founding private schools to offer an alternative to public education. The data also show that the number of home-schooled students has almost doubled in the last three years (CSI, 2022). Taking into account the findings presented here, it would be worth further exploring whether there might be some correlation between the media exposure of quasi-experts and the increasing rejection of mainstream education by the public, and what accounts for the fact that expert scholars speak in the Czech media significantly less often than quasi-experts. It can be assumed that if the number of expert scholars in the media landscape were to increase, it would be possible to correct, at least to some extent, the statements by quasi-experts, which in many respects tend to be one-sided or ideologized, and as a result it would be possible for some cultivation of media discourse to occur.

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