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## *Adult Education 2024 – Competences for Life*

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## **A Message from the Editor-in-Chief**

Dear colleagues,

We are pleased to present you with the proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Adult Education – Competences for Life (IAEC 2024), which took place on December 10, 2024 in Prague at the Faculty of Education, Charles University.

Charles University is the oldest university in Central Europe and has traditionally supported excellence in the humanities and other fields. The Czech Andragogy Society, co-organizer of the conference with the Faculty of Education, Charles University, is the largest professional organization in the Czech Republic specializing in development and research in the field of adult education. The conference focused on the development and strengthening of adult competences not only within formal education, but also at the professional, civic and personal levels. The emphasis was placed on the changing context of the present time, characterized by constant changes and technological progress. The international scientific conference was attended by a number of experts specializing in adult education. Among the participants were representatives from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Germany and Australia.

The content of the proceedings follows the main topics of the conference, which were presented in individual sections:

- Current challenges of school management
- Support for pedagogical development of teachers
- The impact of global changes on adult education strategies
- Seniors and the contemporary world

A number of key topics were discussed during the conference, which fundamentally influence the current form of adult education. These topics are also reflected in the analytical and research articles contained in these proceedings. The main areas of interest included the use of digital technologies in adult education and learning, including artificial intelligence, which enables the personalization of the educational process and opens up new possibilities for individualized adult learning. Another key topic was the strategic document of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports entitled Competence Framework for Graduate Teachers. The Competence Framework for Graduate Teachers was presented at the conference as a key tool for improving the quality of training of future teachers in the Czech Republic. Participants discussed not only its content and significance, but also specific implementation options at faculties preparing teachers. They focused on the integration of individual competencies into the curriculum, methods of their development and assessment during studies and pedagogical practices. Last but not least, the discussion focused on supporting the competencies of seniors as a prerequisite for their active participation in social events and maintaining autonomy in various life situations.

All included contributions are the result of the authors' original professional work, have not yet been published and were not offered for publication in other periodicals or proceedings at the time of submission.

We believe that the proceedings will bring stimulating impulses to experts, practitioners and students and contribute to the development of research and innovation in the field of adult education.

Sincerely,  
Jaroslav Kříž

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# Self-education of teachers in preparation for the curriculum reform in Slovakia

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Ivan Pavlov, Petra Fridrichová, Lenka Rovňanová and Soňa Szabó

## Abstract:

The Slovak education system is preparing for curricular changes that will be fully implemented beginning in 2026. Teacher preparation is crucial for the success of the reform, and the search for effective tools to support professional learning is the subject of both fundamental and applied research. This paper analyzes teacher's self-education (informal learning) as one of the recognized forms and methods of professional development. A research probe has gathered data on Slovak teachers' opinions on their self-education and presents findings that highlight the need to optimize tools for effective support of their professional learning.

## Keywords:

teacher, curricular reform, professional self-education, professional development, support for professional self-education

## Introduction

Support for the professional development of teaching is one of the priorities in the educational policies of the European Union and national states. Slovak teachers are currently preparing for implementation of the curricular reform, which all primary schools will join in 2026. A key task is the preparation of teachers for these significant content and methodological changes and the search for effective methods and forms of support. Professional Law of Slovak Teaching (2019) views professional development as a process of deepening, improving, and expanding professional competencies, carried out according to professional standards (Pavlov, 2022b) and in accordance with current scientific knowledge, professional, and societal requirements.

Support for the professional development is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of any curriculum reform. Teachers' ability to engage in self-educating is increasingly recognized as an essential professional competency. Empirical research indicates that teachers benefit significantly from continuing professional development, particularly when programs incorporate self-regulated learning strategies (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Therefore, fostering self-regulated learning among teachers and to identifying key predictors of successful self-education are essential research areas (Pasternatskyi et al., 2022). Additionally, the transition to 21st-century teaching requires structured support for educators to effectively integrate new competencies into instructional practice effectively (Haug & Mork, 2021).

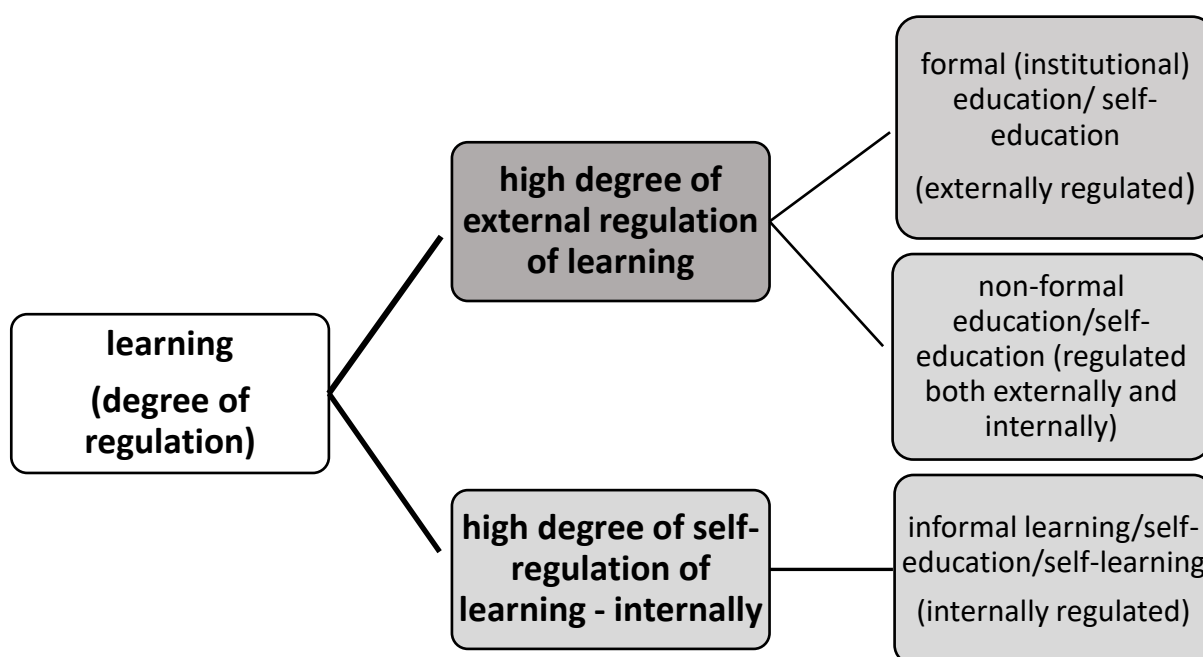
Teacher self-assessment has been identified as a crucial mechanism for professional growth, as reflective practices contribute to improved instructional efficacy (Ross & Bruce, 2007). Furthermore, studies indicate that pre-service teachers' self-efficacy increased significantly when education reforms were accompanied by comprehensive training programs (Gordon et al., 2024) and another study focused on early literacy reform underscores the importance of sustained professional development in achieving meaningful educational outcomes (Marinelli et al., 2023). These findings suggest that teacher self-education plays a crucial role in adapting to curricular changes, particularly when supported by institutional initiatives that encourage lifelong learning (Gordon et al., 2022).

Teachers' self-education in their professional development has, in addition to its organizational aspect (support), an equally important element of understanding the conceptualization of self-education as part of lifelong learning. The current understanding of lifelong learning processes is based on formal and informal education, which has recently gained

socio-economic importance and scientific attention (EU 2012). The competencies of personal and social skills, as well as the competence to learn how to learn hold significant importance in supporting lifelong learning (Sala, 2020). Informal learning results from everyday activities related to work, family life, or leisure time, and it is neither organized nor structured according to educational goals, time, or educational support. Informal learning does not necessarily have to be intentional from learner’s perspective. This concept is often a topic of scientific discussion because its conceptualization comes from many different approaches, and despite considerable research efforts, it remains inadequately grounded and interpreted.

Self-education is a term without a single, universally accepted definition. It is a multi-faceted concept that cannot be approached from just one perspective, which is why no single, universally accepted definition exists. In our understanding, we define it broadly as an activity in which an individual takes initiative and responsibility for their own learning. It can take place within formal and non-formal education and, along with incidental (accidental) and tacit (silent) learning, is classified as informal learning (which is unorganized, unsystematic, and institutionally uncoordinated). Unlike incidental and tacit learning—which are unintentional (with tacit learning also being unconscious) —self-education is intentional, conscious, and accessible to empirical research. Scheme 1 illustrates the relationships within self-education processes, determined by the principle of regulation (external/internal), which in practical life creates specific opportunities for andragogical interventions in formal and non-formal education, as well as in informal learning.

Diagram 1 Regulation in adult learning processes



Source: author

Despite its benefits, self-education presents challenges that must be addressed to ensure its effectiveness. While some educators embrace change, others may resist it due to deeply ingrained instructional habits (Quirke et al., 2023). Research suggest that self-education initiatives are most successful when they are supported by peer collaboration and institutional backing (Cleary et al., 2022). A systematic literature review on teacher self-efficacy and reform underscores the necessity of structured support to help teachers navigate changes effectively, reinforcing the idea that professional confidence is a key factor in the success of curriculum implementation (Gordon et al., 2022).

The professional development of teachers takes place through education (both formal and non-formal) and self-education (informal learning). The support of teachers' professional learning in preparation for the reform is currently being implemented through the following methods (Pavlov & Krystoň 2020):

- a) evaluation of the needs of individual learners, work teams, and entire organizations (schools), which has so far been a pilot but not a systematic tool for supporting professional development (Pavlov, 2022b).
- b) organization of primarily formal education programs, which are innovative in nature and mainly intended for individuals, rarely for teaching teams.
- c) rare organization of non-formal educational activities for entire school teaching staffs.

Teachers' self-education in Slovakia remains one of the least theoretically and methodologically developed aspects of professional development support.

## 2. Methodology

To develop effective tools for supporting teachers' self-education, it is essential to understand the specifics, peculiarities, and challenges that teachers face in their self-education. We examine self-education in a broad context as a lifelong, conscious, voluntary, planned, active, and individual learning activity, influenced by many factors (both internal and external). This process shapes the ability for docility (learning how to learn), which is continuously refined throughout life. Individuals, either independently or with support, address their learning needs to reconcile the gap between what they do not know and what they want to learn. Ultimately, the process of self-education not only leads to acquiring planned educational content (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) but also contributes to personal growth, including confidence in one's abilities, motivation, willpower, character, ideals, and values. The research team working on the KEGA project formulated the research question: How do teachers in Slovak schools perceive selected aspects of their self-education? The research probe was conducted in December 2024 using an anonymous electronic survey (Google Forms), with participation from 1,291 pedagogical and professional employees, including 114 men (9 %) and 1,170 women (91 %), classified into four career stages within the professional system: 382 (31 %) beginner teachers, 563 (36 %) independent teachers, 168 (14 %) with the first certification, 122 (10 %) with the second certification. Based on teaching experience: 245 (19 %) had up to 5 years of experience, 301 (23 %) up to 15 years, 306 (24 %) up to 25 years, 271 (21 %) up to 35 years, 165 (13 %) over 35 years.

The research probe included questions addressing various aspects of teachers' self-education, such as: the perceived role of self-education in professional development, financial and time demands, the application of self-education outcomes to improve teaching practices, external and internal barriers preventing the application of self-education results in teaching practice, entities supporting self-education, available assistance and support options for self-education.

## 3. Results

Above, we indicated that to develop effective tools for supporting teachers' professional self-education, it is essential to understand their perspectives on its role in professional development. For the purposes of interpretation, we selected specific survey items that can help us better understand the current situation and design supportive tools for implementing the curricular reform in Slovakia.

We asked teachers whether they were taught at school how to engage in self-education (learning how to learn). The responses were as follows:

- a) I don't remember – 561 (44 %)
- b) definitely not – 245 (19 %)
- c) yes, I was encouraged to engage in self-education – 473 (37 %).

It is widely accepted that formal (school-based) education can enhance individuals' ability to self-educate (often considered a goal of formal education). However, there is insufficient conclusive evidence regarding which academic education strategies or informal activities contribute to the development of self-education potential in adults. It will be necessary to examine not only school curricula but also higher education programs (in teacher training) and teaching methods to determine whether they include tools and strategies for fostering a culture of self-education.

In response to the question "Why do you engage in self-education?", teachers provided the following answers:

- a) my job/employer requires it – 169 (13 %)
- b) I consider it a natural part of professional self-development – 644 (50 %)
- c) I want to continuously improve myself in various areas of personal growth – 459 (36 %)
- d) Other – 9 (1 %)

The responses largely reassured us that teachers perceive self-education as a natural part of their professional self-development and are motivated to continuously improve. This finding regarding teachers' professional commitment provides a strong foundation for designing measures to support their self-education.

We were interested in whether teachers are aware of how they apply the results of their self-education in their teaching practice. The responses we received were as follows:

- a) I haven't thought about it – 50 (4 %)
- b) I always check whether what I have learned on my own can be applied in my teaching practice – 453 (35 %)
- c) I sometimes reflect on whether what I have learned on my own can be applied in my teaching practice – 255 (20 %)
- d) I use the results of my self-education for pedagogical innovations (curricula, thematic plans, etc.) – 488 (38 %)
- e) I do not intentionally use the results of my self-education in my teaching practice – 39 (3 %)

It is encouraging that the results of teachers' self-education contribute to their pedagogical innovations or are incorporated into validated practices in teaching. Only a small percentage (7 %) of respondents never or only occasionally consider the application of their self-education outcomes. For these individuals, it would be beneficial to develop activities that foster a conscious connection between the competencies acquired through self-education and their application and evaluation in teaching practice.

To confirm the ability to reflect on the areas in which self-education helps teachers improve their competencies, the most frequently selected responses (respondents could choose up to three options) were recorded:

- a) in my pedagogical work with students (teaching): 1097 (45 %)
- b) in my pedagogical practice outside of teaching: 290 (12 %)
- c) in deepening my personal interests and hobbies: 314 (13 %)
- d) in professional advancement and teaching career: 716 (29 %)
- e) I cannot identify any specific improvement: 37 (2 %)

The results confirmed that self-education primarily develops the competencies needed for pedagogical work with students (both in teaching and beyond), as well as for career development (advancing competencies within the career system) and deepening personal interests and hobbies.

When asked about the obstacles preventing teachers from engaging in self-education, respondents answered as follows:

- a) my employer has no interest in supporting my self-education: 62 (3 %)
- b) I lack motivation and conditions for self-education: 90 (5 %)
- c) if I had more financial resources, I would definitely engage in self-education: 531 (27 %)

- d) there is a limited supply of suitable learning resources for self-education: 206 (10 %)
- e) I do not have enough free time for self-education: 560 (28 %)
- f) even if I acquire something through self-education, I do not see a way to apply it in my teaching practice: 88 (4 %)
- g) I do not perceive any obstacles to my self-education: 432 (22 %)

A quarter of respondents do not perceive any obstacles to their self-education and the most significant barriers identified by the remaining respondents were the lack of financial resources and limited time availability for self-education. It will likely be important to examine the financial accessibility of self-education opportunities, as well as the time (and psychological) workload of teachers (time analysis), which prevents them from fully developing its potential.

For this reason, we asked another question about how much time per week teachers dedicate to self-education, and we received the following responses:

- a) I do not engage in self-education: 17 (1 %)
- b) less than an hour: 337 (26 %)
- c) approximately 1 to 3 hours: 711 (55 %)
- d) more than 3 hours: 169 (13 %)
- e) other: 49 (4 %)

The results indicate a variety of responses, suggesting that the majority of respondents (68 %) spend at least one hour per week on self-education, which we consider satisfactory in terms of professional development. Teachers likely included their regular preparation for daily teaching in this estimate, which can justifiably be considered part of self-education. The low number of respondents (17 %) who dedicate less than an hour per week to self-education signals that there is a group of teachers who do not utilize it for their professional development.

We asked teachers whether they had ever sought help when they struggled with self-education. Their responses were as follows:

- a) no, I don't need it: 210 (16 %)
- b) sometimes I would appreciate advice if I have trouble deciding or navigating self-education: 359 (28 %)
- c) seeking help depends on the topic of self-education: 523 (41 %)
- d) yes, I have sought help, and the support was useful: 194 (15 %).

The responses indicate openness to seeking help and positive experiences of teachers (cumulatively 80 %) with support and guidance in self-education. Only 16 % of respondents stated that they do not need such support. These findings suggest the need to develop an effective advisory support system for self-education, for example, in analyzing learning needs, selecting programs and education providers, and addressing other teacher requirements (Pavlov, 2020).

#### 4. Conclusion

As we have already indicated, supporting teachers' self-education in their professional development has at least two important aspects that need to be explored. These aspects can be provisionally labeled as:

1. theoretical (conceptual) aspect of self-education
2. practical (organizational) aspect of self-education

The theoretical aspect requires a deeper understanding of the fundamental processes underlying self-education. According to Pavlov & Valášková Vincejová (2024), self-education:

- is theoretically grounded, with explanations found in human sciences (anthropology, psychology, pedagogy, andragogy, and others);
- is conscious and intentional, requiring individual effort and awareness to achieve necessary changes in behavior and actions;
- is planned and goal-oriented, aimed at achieving set life ideals;
- is voluntary (driven by a specific need that individuals satisfy);

- is systematic (based on and utilizing structured learning strategies);
- is lifelong and developmental (building upon previously acquired knowledge, refining cognitive abilities, motivation, self-regulation in learning, as well as personal and character traits);
- is active and value-driven, aligned with life goals (in professional, personal, and civic life);
- is determined (by internal and external factors);
- is synchronized current and future societal (labor market) needs with individual potential;
- is enhancing self-confidence, fostering the ability to actively overcome obstacles (not only in learning);
- is open to advice and guidance for personal growth and improvement;
- is paradoxical (as individuals become aware of what they still do not know, creating a gap between learned and unknown knowledge that requires innovative learning strategies and approaches).

The practical aspect requires, based on theoretical foundations and knowledge of practical needs, the collection of evidence on the support of teachers' professional development and the creation of models and tools that effectively help teachers develop the competence to "learn how to learn" and successfully apply their learning outcomes in pedagogical practice in schools.

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