

ADULT EDUCATION **STUDIES** 2025

Ivan PAVLOV (ed.)

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Ivan Pavlov (ed.)

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Dear readers,

It is with our sincere pleasure that we present to you the eighth edition of the collection of scientific papers, *Andragogical Studies*, which is published by the Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy of the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. Over the past years, this collection has become a stable and respected platform for the presentation of research, theoretical, and applied works in the field of andragogy, pedagogy, and related sciences.

Since its inception, *Andragogical Studies* has aimed to create a space for professional dialogue and exchange of knowledge between researchers, university teachers, doctoral students, and practitioners. The ambition of the collection is to contribute to the development of scientific discourse on adult education in the long term and to support the connection between theory and practice – the basic condition for the qualitative development of lifelong learning. This year's edition retains its polythematic and international character. We intended to create a space for the presentation of diverse content, but professionally coherent works that reflect current issues of adult education in various social and institutional contexts.

The collection is divided into two main thematic areas – literacy with an emphasis on adult media literacy and adult self-education. The first area includes contributions focused on the specifics of employees in career crisis and their educational potential (J. Malach, K. Malachová, D. Vicherková, M. Kolář), the issue of illiteracy in a historical context (E. Lukáč), and media literacy in the online environment (M. Beran Sládkayová). The second area brings views on adult self-learning from the point of view of paradigmatic aspects (H. Vavříková, D. Temiaková) and in various professional groups – teachers (V. Pančíková, M. Majzlík), teaching assistants (S. Dulovics Sámelová), university teachers (M. Chmura) and public library workers (I. Babjaková).

We believe that this eighth edition of *Andragogical Studies* will also be an inspiring source of knowledge, reflections, and new impulses for scientific and professional practice for readers.

In conclusion, we would like to thank all the authors for their professional contributions, as well as the reviewers for their responsible and stimulating assessments of the contributions, which significantly contributed to the overall quality of the proceedings.

Editor

BEHAVIORAL, HEALTH, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND COGNITIVE PECULIARITIES OF EMPLOYEES IN A CAREER CRISIS AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL

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Abstract: *The article outlines the primary focus and objectives of the project OP Just Transformation REFRESH (Research Excellence for Region Sustainability and High-tech Industries, project number CZ10.03.01/00/22_003/0000048), which is currently being implemented within the Moravian-Silesian Region—an area poised to transition away from coal mining. A key methodological approach employed to analyse the characteristics of this professional demographic involves a comprehensive questionnaire survey. This survey comprises a targeted set of questions that explore the behavioural, health, psychological, and cognitive characteristics experienced by employees of mining companies in the context of a career crisis. To facilitate a robust empirical analysis, the survey will encompass responses from a cohort of more than 500 individuals, thereby enabling an assessment of the educational potential of the observed groups in terms of their respective individual characteristics.*

Keywords: *mining profession, career crisis, motivation to perform, life satisfaction, career adaptability, educational needs, a barrier to participation in education, parental optimism, health conditions, and learning styles*

1 INTRODUCTION

Coal mining in the Ostrava region boasts a rich history, dating back to the late 18th century. Throughout more than 240 years of mining, small adit tunnels evolved into an intricate network of deep mines, which have been vital to the region's advancement and that of Czechoslovakia. Mining operations have impacted not only the economy but also the lifestyle of local communities and the region's landscape. We are now approaching the concluding phase of this extensive era. The coal industry in the Ostrava region is expected to conclude around 2025/2026, prompting active consideration of future strategies. The REFRESH project is a key initiative to realise the SMARAGD vision, representing a significant investment to boost

research excellence in the Moravian-Silesian Region. It aims to create a unique European infrastructure for research and technology transfer in areas like sustainable energy, industrial digitalisation, transport automation, environmental technologies, and smart materials. A primary goal is to encourage collaboration between academic and industrial stakeholders to transform the region into a smart, sustainable environment. Within this broader scientific framework, the Faculty of Education at the University of Ostrava is undertaking a specific sub-task titled "Educational Pathways with an Inventive Dimension and New Job Opportunities within the Decline of Mining Activities in the Moravian-Silesian Region" as part of the Social Lab 4 research collective. This endeavour has already engaged up to ten researchers and will continue to expand its involvement as the project evolves.

The research endeavour aims to investigate the profound impact of sectoral transformation on education and the resulting educational opportunities that arise from identifying the needs of the community affected by this change, particularly focusing on OKD workers and their families (including children) in the Moravian-Silesian Region. According to Zindulková and Syslová (2021), transitioning away from coal requires careful consideration of the social aspects involved in planning a just transition. This includes establishing compensation schemes and early retirement options, as well as determining sufficient amounts to ensure dignity and security for affected individuals. However, high compensation alone does not address all issues faced by residents in former coal regions. Additionally, the authors emphasise that investing in education is a long-term strategy that yields benefits. Preparing the younger generation to actively participate in shaping a future economy and society that is not reliant on extraction is vital, extending beyond just technical disciplines.

Career (from the French *carrière*, meaning "occupation") refers to an individual's social mobility within a profession or society. Traditionally, it denotes a movement towards a higher social status, which encompasses enhanced prestige, greater power, and increased financial resources. In contemporary discussions, "career" may describe an individual's professional journey, regardless of whether it is upward or downward, summarising their development over time. Important social factors impacting career advancement include family dynamics—both family of origin and family of choice and personal, such as family size, number of children or the spouse's career—as well as broader societal contexts, notably the accessibility of education, the nature of job opportunities, and the general fluidity of mobility pathways, alongside shifts in the wide social macro system.

The closure of mining plants is a cause of career crisis for many of their employees, as well as employees of downstream companies, and can be viewed within the theoretical

framework of crisis and crisis situations. Crisis or crisis situations are a natural and inevitable part of human development and the social subsystems of various orders. A crisis is a situation in which the functioning of a specific system or part of it is severely disrupted, necessitating a timely and systematic decision and solution. A crisis situation is an extraordinary event, according to the Act on the Integrated Rescue System, characterised by the disruption of critical infrastructure or other dangers in which a state of danger, state of emergency, or state of national threat is declared. (Ministry of the Interior, 2016). Crisis theory defines its three essential phases: pre-crisis, crisis phase, and post-crisis (Trojanová & Svobodová, 2021); alternatively, it is described in four phases: prodromal, acute, chronic, and restitution (Honzák & Novotná, 2021). Crisis or crisis situations are a natural and inevitable part of human development and the social subsystems of various orders. A crisis is a situation in which the functioning of a specific system or part of it is severely disrupted, necessitating a timely and systematic decision and solution. A crisis situation is an extraordinary event. In the pre-crisis phase, the sub-phases "the calm before the storm, first signals, and efforts to avert the crisis" can be manifested in the crisis phase, the sub-phase "outbreak, peak, and recovery", and in the post-crisis phase, the sub-phase "reflection, learning, and adjustment measures" (ibid., p. 24). The phases and sub-phases of the crisis are important constructs, the course of which will be empirically analysed and evaluated from the point of view of management activities and decision-making acts of management, which can be categorised into individual approaches to the crisis: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Trojanová & Svobodová, 2021. p. 27). From the few studies on the general benefits of crises, Turbová and Cagaš (2004) came up with a total of 16 categories, of which the following can be mentioned in particular: 1) Yes, a crisis is beneficial, 2) Under certain conditions, a crisis is beneficial, but it must not be too destructive, 3) Strengthening, hardening, personality development, 4) Crisis as motivation, "prodding", "the desire to keep fighting", 5) Getting to know oneself, a test of strength, 6) Changing values, strengthening values, 7) Changing the view of the world, of other people - usually rather negative (e.g. caution as a benefit of a crisis) ,8) Learning from experience, avoiding mistakes, and 9) Increasing sensitivity to others, empathy 10) Determining the strength of the partnership.

2 METHODOLOGY

The main research objective is to employ a comprehensive array of research methodologies to delineate workers' specific professional and personal characteristics during a critical phase of their (post) careers. The primary research methods include a questionnaire survey of mining industry employees and their children, individual and group interviews with

employees, and case studies. From an andragogical perspective, the employment of a research instrument in the form of a meticulously structured questionnaire—designed from standardised diagnostic assessments and validated instruments developed by other researchers, alongside the author's questionnaires—constitutes a robust and comprehensive methodology for investigating the attitudes, opinions, needs, and circumstances of employees. This instrument is organised into seven distinct sections:

The first part is a standardised "*Performance Motivation Questionnaire – LMI*" that assesses attitudes towards work, employment and work performance. Hofrege-Testcentrum, s.r.o., Prague, distributes the questionnaire by Schuller, Prochaska and Hoskovcová (2003). The questionnaire aims to determine employees' interest in meeting professional and work-related goals, as well as the factors influencing their interest in professional and personal growth, lifelong learning, and work success. The final version of the questionnaire consists of 170 items, which are assigned to 17 scales (dimensions): Perseverance, Dominance, Engagement, Confidence in success, Flexibility, Flow, Fearlessness, Internality, Compensatory effort, Pride in performance, Willingness to learn, Difficulty preference, Independence, Self-control, Status orientation, Competitiveness and Goal-orientedness.

The second part is a standardised "*Life Satisfaction Questionnaire*", which assesses satisfaction with individual areas of personal life. The questionnaire aims to determine a person's satisfaction with their personal life. The REFRESH project focuses on individual satisfaction in areas of everyday life in society 4.0. The authors of the questionnaire, Fahrenberg, Myrtek, Schumacher and Braehler (2001), using a total of 70 items, offer the opportunity to determine the level of individual satisfaction in a total of ten dimensions: Health, Work and employment, Financial situation, Leisure time, Marriage and partnership, Relationship with one's own children, Oneself, Sexuality, Friends, acquaintances, relatives and Housing.

The third part is a validated "*Career Adaptability Questionnaire*", used to collect data on thinking and planning for the future by relying on oneself, accepting responsibility for one's actions, being open to fulfilling tasks that lead to personal growth, overcoming obstacles that lead to personal development, and being open to new opportunities. The questionnaire aims to assess an individual's ability to adapt to the current labour market situation, which is also the target of the REFRESH project. Career adaptability has been defined as a set of psychosocial resources, in the sense of self-regulatory abilities, that enable an individual to solve new, complex, and unclearly defined problems, as well as career development tasks, job changes, and work-related issues (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). It is a set of psychosocial resources or

aspects of personality that help an individual create strategies for managing their adaptive reactions. Psychosocial resources viewed in this way enable an individual to manage career behaviour and, thus, career development (Hlad'o and Kvasková (eds., 2020). The Czech version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-Czech Form (CAAS-Czech) (Hlad'o, Kvasková, Ježek, Hirschi & Macek, 2020) is an update of the English version of the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS). It allows the examined ability to be divided into four dimensions: Concern, Control, Curiosity and Self-Confidence.

The fourth part is the author's "*Personal Educational Needs and Organisation Evaluation Questionnaire*", a combination of the modified SIW-Skills Inventory Worksheet, AllthingsAdmin (2024), and a modified version of the internationally developed tool for identifying current professional development needs in an organisation (Błaszczński, Kobylarek & Jakubowska, 2021). The questionnaire is internally structured, and 81 items allow for the identification of educational needs in the form of competencies or skills: Communication, Numerical, Creative and Artistic, Technical and Digital, Managerial and Self-Management, Social, Critical Thinking and Research, and Business. At the same time, it allows the employer to evaluate the organisation in terms of employee satisfaction with selected parameters of its perspective and relationship with employees.

The fifth part of the "*Barriers to Participation in Education Questionnaire*" is based on the results of European monitoring (European Commission, 2019) and helps identify the barriers respondents face in participating in education. For reasons of comparability of results, the traditional triad of barriers to participation (situational, institutional and dispositional barriers) (e.g. Kalenda, Kočvarová & Vaculíková, 2024) will be supplemented with 10 items, for which each respondent will evaluate each of the most influential barriers according to the monitoring using a five-point scale. The items name the following barriers: Family responsibilities, Lack of time, High financial costs of education, Health or age, Lack of support from the employer or the state, Lack of suitable educational courses, Distance from the educational institution, Inaccessibility of the internet or computer, Negative previous experiences with courses and Demanding entry requirements to the course.

The sixth part, the author's "*Parental Optimism Questionnaire*," was created by the researchers to determine the level of parental confidence in the child's ability to fulfil their educational goals. The authors' idea to formulate the construct of parental optimism was inspired by similar constructs of collective or individual academic optimism (school, teacher) (Straková, Simonová and Greger, 2017), which has three primary latent constructs (collective

perceived efficacy, trust in the teaching staff and the school's emphasis on academic results) at the teacher and school levels. Using 12 questions, the potential of using the construct itself will be verified in six dimensions, which are The parent's belief in the ability (prerequisites) of their child to graduate from school, The belief that they will be interested in studying, The belief that they will have enough will to study, The belief that their family creates sufficient (optimal) conditions for studying in terms of material and the opinion held on the position of education in the value scale, The assumption that parents can be an example to the child when deciding on studying/or already in studying, and The belief that their child goes to a school that motivates them to continue studying and at the same time provides them with quality teaching enabling further study. Data obtained from the children of employees using a similar tool in the form of a questionnaire on the student's academic optimism will allow us to compare the opinions of the parent and their child and determine the degree of their agreement and differences between them on the issues of the educational paths of children from mining families.

The seventh part, "*Questionnaire of Health Conditions and Learning Styles*", was created by the project's author team to assess the health conditions of the respondents and to identify their learning methods for the needs of further education. When constructing the questionnaire, approaches and parts of analytical tools were used that examine individual psychological, cognitive-educational, behavioural, physiological, physical, health, and social (family) conditions, as well as the conditions under which workers in all types of mining professions perform their work. These concepts primarily encompass health (physical and psychological), well-being, human resources and leadership, docility theory, the definition of key learning competencies, and other related areas. Their specification and aggregation will enable targeted career guidance and support for these employees in the current crisis phase of their careers.

The collection of research data using a "*comprehensive, structured questionnaire*" is carried out over more than six months, as the research sample of employees will be representative and will consist of around 500 respondents from the mining industry complemented by dozens of respondents without a professional specification, enabling comparison of data valid for the research sample with at least a smaller sample of the general adult population in the region.

3 EXPECTED BENEFITS

Expected benefits can be categorised according to socio-economic and administrative levels, into whose functioning they can, instead of should, prospectively intervene. Functioning

mining organisations, such as OKD (Ostravsko-karvinské doly) and DIAMO, can use up-to-date and objective information on the state of human resources and their professional perspectives. Data can contribute to the retention and development of qualified workers in the Moravian-Silesian region, thereby blocking their ongoing displacement. As far as the development of science and the transfer of knowledge is concerned, an extensive research investigation can contribute to the verification of a set of research tools, the building of prospective scientific teams, and the deepening of cooperation between the academic and application spheres.

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is necessary to state the benefits that can be expected from the research probe, with its significant content targeting and extensive scope of research from the perspective of andragogy. There will be the following five benefits:

1. Verification of a set of research tools for examining the professional life and development of adults and the educational perspectives of their children.
2. Verification of research hypotheses on the relationships between several predefined variables.
3. Publishing the results obtained from a representative set of respondents in renowned journals.
4. Utilisation of research process procedures in higher education of andragogy teachers.
5. Popularisation of the field of andragogy, increasing its prestige and applicability in solving social tasks.

The project's timetable indicates that most of the fundamental results of the survey of employees in mining professions and their children in the Moravian-Silesian Region will be published in scientific journals, professional meetings, and the media during 2025 and 2026.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ELIMINATION OF ILLITERACY IN THE ARMY IN SLOVAKIA DURING THE 20TH CENTURY

Eduard Lukáč

Abstract: *After the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, the new republic had to deal with many serious problems, one of which was illiteracy. This phenomenon was also characteristic of the newly formed army, when conscripts were identified as not knowing the basic skills of reading and writing when they entered compulsory military service. For this purpose, courses were introduced for illiterate recruits, and specific spelling books for soldiers were also compiled. The article maps these activities cross-sectionally during the 20th century in the conditions of the army in Slovakia.*

Keywords: *illiteracy, courses for illiterate soldiers, the army in Slovakia*

INTRODUCTION

The army is an indispensable part of the functioning of every developed state, which, in addition to protecting the sovereignty of the country and its defence, is also involved in rescue operations or in assisting the population in natural disasters. Since the establishment of the interwar Czechoslovakia in 1918, the army of the new state formation was gradually formed, but for many years it had to eliminate illiteracy among the recruits who entered compulsory military service. For this purpose, courses for illiterate soldiers and textbooks – syllabary, or military syllabary, served.

1 PERIOD OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC (1918 - 1938)

The building of the armed forces in the new state formation, the Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938), was also connected with educational activities, which were managed by the Educational Department of the Ministry of National Defence (MND) in Prague. It also included efforts to eradicate illiteracy among soldiers, which was ascertained at the time of conscription, or at the time of entry into military service at individual military units. Subsequently, these individuals were assigned to courses for illiterate soldiers, in which classes were taught from November to the end of March, for two hours a day. The courses usually ended in April with final examinations in front of the commission in writing (short dictation and independent writing (a letter home), reading (from a reading book and from a newspaper, presenting what had been read), and arithmetic (small multiplication tables and arithmetic from memory), and

the examiners were teachers and school inspectors. For this purpose, in 1920, the regulation "Awareness-raising and moral education of the troops" was issued, which for the garrisons on the territory of Slovakia unequivocally commanded: „In Slovak units there are compulsory courses for men who do not know how to read and write.“ (Osvětová a mravní výchova vojska, p. 126). R. Oberpfalcer states (p. 187), that according to the statistical data of the Education Department, there were 3,555 illiterate soldiers in the army on 1st February 1920, of whom 1,451 were Slovaks, 1,141 Ruthenians, 459 Czechs, 261 Hungarians, 132 Germans and 110 from other nationalities.

Table 1 Illiterate recruits in the Czechoslovak Army and their success rate in courses for illiterates

<i>year</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>Slovaks</i>	<i>Czechs</i>	<i>Germans</i>	<i>Hungarians</i>	<i>Ruthenians</i>	<i>Romanians</i>	<i>others</i>	<i>success</i>
1924	2 709	1 318	118	53	160	1 024	36	-	1 715
1927	4 339	1 922	343	160	398	1 446	56	14	3 213

(processed by: Valenta, F. p. 390; Valenta, F. – Kozák, R. pp. 215-216)

The pioneer in this activity was the Czech teacher J. Kožíšek, who had many years of experience in teaching reading and writing to children. In the first months of 1920 he started teaching a group of 15 illiterate soldiers from Slovakia. On the basis of this experience he developed a textbook for soldiers written in Slovak „Velký čitateľ. Šlabikár pre ľud“ (A great reader. A syllabary for the people. 1921) and published a methodological guide for course teachers „Průvodce ke slabikáři pro lid: Velký čitateľ“ (Guide to the syllabary for the people: The great reader. 1921). In addition to the above-mentioned textbook, a decree of the MND No. 37.522/1926 the use of the military syllabary „Vpřed! Vojenský slabikář.“ (Forward! Military Syllabary. 1926) was also approved. The author was the Deputy Head of the 7th Section of the Ministry staff captain Karel Teringl. The name military textbook is based on the fact, that the content was aimed at presenting military texts, pictures and examples. „After Kožíšek's syllabary and the works of Suchard, we have our own exclusively military syllabary, which honourably takes its place alongside similar military syllabaries of the French, Romanian, Polish and Soviet armies. It is based on economic and psychological principles.“ (J. H. D., p. 647). Slovak linguist B. Letz stressed that the Comenius principle of elementary teaching in the mother tongue was not observed in the teaching of Slovak soldiers. He pointed out spelling and linguistic inaccuracies in the Slovak text of the textbook, bohemianisms and even the corruption of Slovak names. „The Slovak text in the textbook is represented by the section "To the attention of the Slovaks!", where not methodically and concisely enough the peculiar Slovak syllables are pointed out, admittedly not all of them, and in the reading section by five articles and three poems of military or utilitarian-patriotic content.“ (Letz, p. 23). Also for these reasons, B. Letz advocates the compilation of a Slovak syllabary for soldiers: „Especially from the circumstance that the army

receives relatively the largest number of illiterates from Subcarpathian Russia and Slovakia, the obvious requirement for a completely Slovak military syllabary follows. Hopefully, the next edition will be Slovak!“ (Letz, p. 24). The syllabary was gradually revised and supplemented, also in the spirit of the above-mentioned comments, as evidenced by the 1929 evaluation. „The article section has been reduced, the Slovak and Ruthenian supplement has been deleted and the Slovak and Ruthenian articles are more numerous and alternate with the Czech ones. The new illustrations greatly enhance the reading impression. The increase in the number of Slovak and Ruthenian articles is justified by the preponderance of illiterates of these nationalities, as they constitute two almost 50% groups.“ (Stodola, p. 153). An important moment was also the expansion of the curriculum and the soldiers began to learn also simple numerical operations.

Table 2 Courses for illiterate soldiers 1930-1936 and success rate in the final examination

<i>year</i>	<i>courses</i>	<i>attendance</i>	<i>pass</i>	<i>failed</i>	<i>did not attend</i>
1930	224	4 116	3 444	357	315
1931	190	3 400	2 839	257	304
1932	184	3 095	2 508	277	310
1933	157	2 492	1 977	194	321
1934	120	2 275	1 664	157	454
1935	110	2 063	1 477	153	433
1936	71	1 793	1 418	89	286

(processed by: Statistická příručka Československé republiky, pp. 126-127)

Table 3 Courses for illiterate soldiers 1930-1936 and success rate by nationality

<i>year</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>Czechs</i>	<i>Slovaks</i>	<i>Ruthenians</i>	<i>Polish</i>	<i>Germans</i>	<i>Hungarians</i>	<i>Romanians</i>	<i>others</i>
1930	3444	219	1 230	1 426	8	139	312	78	42
1931	2839	194	1 038	1 094	7	113	287	50	56
1932	2508	169	912	975	11	116	218	37	70
1933	1977	151	671	776	3	73	218	45	40
1934	1664	86	542	743	3	68	125	35	62
1935	1477	81	440	688	6	51	127	39	45
1936	1418	51	394	752	3	38	81	33	66

(processed by: Statistická příručka Československé republiky, pp. 126-127)

One of these courses for illiterate soldiers was also carried out in the 14th Infantry regiment of Prešov, whose final examinations took place on 30th March 1931. They were attended by 33 soldiers (19 Slovaks, 1 Czech, 12 Ruthenians, 1 Roma) with the following grades: very good - 14, good - 8, sufficient - 10 and insufficient - 1. The exam in front of the committee consisted of reading the article and repeating it, writing a dictation (2 sentences) and writing an independent speech in the form of a letter. We give a verbatim transcript of one of

them: „Dear parents, in the meantime accept from me a few words and a permanent remembrance, I am healthy and I am well on military service and until that time I had no punishment and I learned to read and write quite nicely on military service and I am writing this letter to you in my own handwriting.“ (Ada, p. 8).

2 PERIOD OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC (1939 - 1945)

After the establishment of the wartime Slovak Republic in 1939, three dislocated army corps - V., VI. and VII. army corps - operated on its territory from the original Czechoslovak army. The first reorganisation of the army, approved by the government on 2nd May 1939, created new army units - three higher military commands - in Trenčín, Banská Bystrica and Prešov and the MND in Bratislava was the supreme authority.

On 20th July 1939, the Main Military Command, which was part of the MND, issued No. 201.933/1939 regulation entitled “General Guidelines for Training in 1939”. In their section entitled "I. General Regulations," it is stated that these are "the first directives intended to adapt the training and education of the army to the new conditions and Slovak requirements." Also during this period there were illiterate recruits in the army, to which the above-mentioned Directives also responded. As P. Šumichrast (p. 28) adds to this problem in his study: „The compiler of this document did not omit such a difficult problem of those times as the problem of illiteracy occurring among some of the new recruits, and included in this document of fundamental importance the teaching of illiterate. In order to remove this malady, which limited the opportunities for further employment of recruits within the complex machinery of the army, the divisions organized courses of instruction for illiterate members of the army in the various garrisons.“ The directives dealt with the education of illiterate soldiers under "VIII. Moral, religious, national, awareness and physical education of the troops, courses for illiterates". According to the instructions, the various higher commands were to ascertain the illiteracy of recruits who entered military service on 1st March 1939 and report them to the Main Military Headquarters by 30th July 1939.

Table 4 Reports on the number of illiterate soldiers in Slovakia in 1939

<i>military unit</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>more detailed layout of the number</i>
Higher Headquarters 1. Trenčín	66	from: 4 th infantry regiment/10 soldiers; 5 th infantry regiment/27 soldiers; 1 st artillery regiment/2 soldiers; 153 rd artillery regiment/4 soldiers; 51 st artillery regiment/4 soldiers; 1 st cavalry unit/4 soldiers; 2 nd separate battalion/15 soldiers

Higher Headquarters 2. Banská Bystrica	110	n/a
Higher Headquarters 3. Prešov	40	Military garrison Prešov/14 soldiers; Military garrison Kamenica n. Cirochou/24 soldiers
Number of illiterate soldiers	216	

(processed according to MHA Bratislava: Illiterate numbers - reporting.)

In the table above are processed reports of individual Higher Commands from Trenčín, B. Bystrica and Prešov, which surveyed the numbers of illiterates and organised the courses. "Courses for illiterates are being organized in the various garrisons so that they will be completed by examinations by 20/2/1940." (MHA Bratislava, General guidelines for training in 1939). The expenses for the most necessary teaching aids were covered by the military outpost of the respective garrison. "The moral, religious, national, educational, and physical education of the troops outside of employment shall be cultivated and expediently organized in military retreats." (ibid). The courses ended with final examinations, which were to be conducted by 20th February 1940, and reports on the examinations were to be sent to the Main Military Headquarters by 15th March 1940. For subsequent periods, the new directives were based on the 1939 Directives. Training Directives for 1940 No. 212.692/1939, issued on 21st December 1939, in part VIII. C. Courses for illiterates stipulated that: „The courses start on 20th January and end on 25th March 1940. When doing this, calculate that 2 hours per week will be class time during the day job and the other hours will be outside of normal working hours.“ (MHA Bratislava, Training guidelines for 1940). The numbers of illiterates were to be reported by 20th January 1940, and the results of the examinations were to be submitted by 15th April 1940. For 1940 the MND did not plan to provide any funds for the provision of teaching aids.

Table 5 Graduates of courses for illiterate soldiers held from 15th November 1943 – 31st March 1944

<i>military unit</i>	<i>place</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>graduated with benefit</i>				<i>without specifying the benefit</i>
			<i>very good</i>	<i>good</i>	<i>sufficient</i>	<i>insufficient</i>	
infantry regiment 3	Zvolen	8	1	2	4	1	-
infantry regiment 4	Dolný Kubín	22	5	6	7	4	-
infantry regiment 5	Levoča	20	3	6	9	2	-
infantry regiment 6	Trebišov	13	3	5	3	1	1

artillery regiment 1	Topoľčany	5	2	1	1	1	-
artillery regiment 2	Ružomberok	6	2	2	1	1	-
air defence unit 1	Bratislava	4	1	1	2	-	-
total		78	17	23	27	10	1

(MHA Bratislava: Courses for illiterate recruits in military units)

In the conclusion of this section, we can only agree with the opinion of P. Šumichrast (p. 28): „This sincere effort to help a citizen performing military service. To master writing and reading and thereby acquire the necessary human dignity, as well as the prerequisites for further increasing general education for civilian life was, for obvious reasons, very positively evaluated in the society of the time.“

3 SITUATION AFTER THE END OF WORLD WAR II

The end of World War II brought a change in the organisation of the army in Czechoslovakia, which was approved by the government on 25th May 1945. The territory of Czechoslovakia was divided into 4 military regions and Slovakia formed the 4th military region with the headquarters in Bratislava, under which the Regional Administration of Education and Awareness (OSVO) operated. According to the regulation in the Collection of Orders of the Main Administration of Education and Enlightenment No. 8, Article 49 (30th September 1946), the military units were obliged to report the number of illiterate soldiers. Their numbers were obtained by the various services on the basis of a short examination in reading and writing of recruits who had entered military service. The military units that conducted courses for illiterate soldiers were obliged, in accordance with Regulation Š-III-1, § 9, para. 142, to prepare reports on the conduct and completion of courses for illiterate soldiers and to send them to the OSVO.

Table 6 Soldiers sent to courses for the illiterate according to distribution in 1949

<i>city</i>	<i>military units</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>sent from/number of soldiers</i>
Levoča	20 th infantry regiment	47	20 th infantry regiment/47
Komárno	2 nd battalion of 7 th infantry regiment	8	2 nd battalion of 7 th infantry regiment/8
Topoľčany	4 th cavalry unit	14	4 th cavalry unit /11; 9 th artillery regiment /2; 4 th signal regiment/1
Ružomberok	17 th infantry battalion	8	17 th infantry battalion/4; 2 nd railway battalion/1; 188 th artillery unit/1; 56 th artillery regiment/2

Dolný Kubín	45 th infantry battalion	9	45 th infantry battalion/9
Turč. Sv. Martin	262 th artillery unit	9	262 th artillery unit/ 6; 24 th tank brigade/4; 73 rd infantry battalion/8; all Czech soldiers from the relevant units
	24 th tank brigade	9	
	73 rd infantry battalion	Czech soldiers	
Košice	11 th artillery regiment	13	11 th artillery regiment/10; 308 th artillery unit/3
	32 nd infantry regiment Gardský	19	32 nd infantry regiment Gardský /19

(MHA Bratislava: Establishment of courses for illiterates and guidelines for teaching and final exams)

As soon as circumstances allowed, the army began to fulfill the Košice government program after the liberation, including in the area of cultural and educational activities for soldiers. For this purpose, so-called military culture rooms were restored, which, in addition to recreational activities, also fulfilled an educational mission. "These are courses for the illiterate, to supplement school education. Here, the military culture room already fulfills the tasks of the second year: I provide soldiers with the opportunity to enter reserve officer schools and the military academy after completing their education." (Kaše, p. 6). In the early 1960s, voices about the need to combat adult illiteracy grew stronger, including from the military administration, which noted this problem when dealing with illiterate or poorly literate conscripts. The main role in their preparation was played by the IV. departments of the district national committees (departments of education and enlightenment), for which the Internal Affairs Commission issued a regulation on the implementation of courses for illiterate conscripts. Based on the list of conscripts from the district military headquarters and in cooperation with the Czechoslovak Youth Union, they organized enlightenment talks with enlightenment commissions. The courses were to be held in the evenings, or on Saturday afternoons, or on Sundays, in places that would allow a larger number of illiterate conscripts to be concentrated without the need to release them from their jobs. "The curriculum and syllabus will be determined by the district national committee according to the established conditions, number and maturity of the participants, so that illiterate conscripts will learn to read and write in Slovak by the time they begin basic service. As a rule, the course will last 2 to 3 months with 40 to 60 teaching hours. It is recommended to complete these courses in May, June and July, so that only shortcomings and gaps in action can be eliminated in the remaining months." (Kultúrna starostlivosť o brancov, p. 191). The courses were taught by teachers from national schools, who were entrusted with this activity by the relevant district national committee and

who also ensured their financial remuneration. It is interesting that these courses could be attended not only by illiterate conscripts, but also by other illiterate adult residents from the surrounding area. After the end of WWII, the results of the Vienna Arbitration were annulled and, after the return of the territory, Slovak language courses began to be held in these regions for those citizens who did not speak it, or only at a low level. The Education and Enlightenment Commission issued a regulation for district and local enlightenment councils to organize free Slovak language courses for repatriates as well as Slovaks living in this territory. These courses can also include specific courses for conscripts who do not know the official language. The guidelines for these courses determined the following task for the national committees: "An important task for the national committees is to take care of our people's army, especially to ensure that our conscripts are politically and culturally prepared for military service." (J. Š., p. 12). These courses were designed to teach Slovak as an official language necessary for communication in the army, i.e. to learn how to read, write and speak as part of basic military service. "In courses for conscripts of Hungarian nationality (although also of Slovak nationality, if they do not speak Slovak) the "Slovak Language Textbook for Soldiers of Hungarian Nationality" written by R. Soják (Naše vojsko, 1951) will be used." (Kultúrna starostlivosť o brancov, p. 191).

CONCLUSION

One of the unfortunate legacies from the period before the establishment of the interwar Czechoslovakia was the relatively high illiteracy of the population. The new republic solved this problem by educating adults not only through measures in civilian life, but also within the framework of compulsory military service, which was also undertaken by illiterate. Despite many measures, this phenomenon had to be addressed in the army throughout the 20th century.

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DEVELOPING MEDIA LITERACY AS A TOOL TO ELIMINATE THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS AND OTHER ONLINE THREATS

Michaela Beran Sládkayová

Abstract: *In the digital era of the 21st century, media literacy plays a key role in protecting individuals and society from online threats such as fake news, disinformation, hoaxes, deepfakes, and cyberattacks. This study highlights the importance of media literacy as a tool to eliminate the impact of these threats by means of formal and informal education. The goal is to enhance citizens' ability to critically evaluate media content, identify manipulative techniques, and act in the digital space responsibly. This paper draws on research conducted within a VEGA project, which uses focus groups to demonstrate that developing media literacy significantly improves the safety and digital resilience of young adults. It also highlights specific areas in which media literacy is essential – from source identification and technical literacy to ethical and civic competences.*

Keywords: *media literacy, online threats, fake news, disinformation, digital citizenship, critical thinking*

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a digital era in which the media environment has become an inseparable part of our everyday lives, requiring a new level of critical and responsible engagement with information. The lack of information is no longer a problem – but our ability to search for, identify, and critically evaluate its relevance is. This ability belongs among the most important life skills. Today's relative ease of access to information results in an overload.

If a person of the 21st century is supposed to be an active citizen and actively participate in social life, this applies not only to the national context, but also to global citizenship (UNESCO, 2015). Globalisation carries not only positive, but also negative aspects, for example, the ease of access to information which we are sometimes unable to process correctly and efficiently.

Therefore, it is assumed that citizens possess a certain level of media literacy which is developed through both formal and informal education. In this context, it can be stated that media literacy is considered one of the key competences for the 21st century (Glas et al., 2023).

2 *MEDIA LITERACY*

Increasingly more people perceive media (and media communication) as an important source of knowledge and experience as well as entertainment. In our media-saturated age, both print and electronic media bombard us with countless stimuli, and their impact on society as a whole is evident (Vrabec, 2008). UNESCO recognised this reality early on in 1982, it held the International Symposium on Media Education at Grunwald where 19 nations signed the Grunwald Declaration on Media Education, which called to:

1. initiate and support comprehensive media education programmes (from pre-school to university level and adult education)
2. develop training courses for teachers and intermediaries
3. stimulate research and development activities for the benefit of media education
4. support and strengthen the actions of SCO aimed at encouraging international cooperation in media education (UNESCO, 1982).

Media (and information and communication technologies – ICT) have been influencing every individual's everyday life since their dawn. However, they are necessary (Šupšáková, 2013). In 2001, a survey titled *How Americans Used the Internet After the Terror Attack* showed that as many as 81% of Americans obtained up-to-date information from television, 11% from radio, and only 3% from the internet (Rainie, 2001).

Both traditional and new media provide massive amount of information. However, their value can sometimes be low to none. Individuals must learn to swim in this information flood and resist its influence. It is vital to understand and navigate media content to retain one's freedom. The necessary abilities fall into the category of media literacy. Media literacy is a set of skills and competences that enable individuals to maintain a critical distance from the media and their content, allowing them to make full use of these information sources for education, quality entertainment, and leisure activities (Šupšáková, 2013). Media literacy is based on teaching how the media work, how they are organised, and how they construct reality (Hrdináková, 2013). It also covers the „skills and abilities necessary for the responsible use of media. Media literacy includes critical thinking and recipients' attitudes to media and media content in terms of moral principles and humanism, which allows them to use media for their own benefit to satisfy their own needs and interests” (Balážová, 2012, p. 7). Rožukalne, Skulte and Stakle (2020) describe media literacy as the knowledge and skills necessary to use information sources, search for and analyse information, understand the information obtained, critically evaluate it, distinguish between credible and distorted information, and compare news from various sources with the aim of developing one's own opinion or forming an attitude

towards a specific topic.

Media literacy is therefore considered a key competence for life in an information- and knowledge-based society. The goal is to develop specific abilities that allow people to navigate all kinds of media content and recognise the factors, which influence its creation and effect on the audience (Vrabec, 2008).

Media literacy is linked to media education. Media education is a deliberate process of learning and teaching about media. It allows for the gradual development of creative problem-solving abilities and critical thinking. Over time, its participants become reasonable and cautious recipients and creators (spreaders) of information (Petranová, 2013) who always verify their sources, authors, and media in general.

All of this creates a digital citizen(ship). A digital citizen uses digital technology consciously and safely. They actively and constantly engage in public life and societal matters via ICT to achieve goals in line with the ideas of democratic society and rule of law. Human rights are adhered to, online sources are controlled, and communication is respectful (even with people with different opinions). Digital citizenship uses modern technology that should benefit the humankind (Smatana et al., 2021). However, there are also threats that complicates our activity not only in the online environment, but also beyond it. Online threats include hoaxes, fake news, disinformation, and many others.

3 ONLINE THREATS

Today's information overload allows for the growth of various online threats as well. For the purposes of this paper, online threats refer mainly to the spread of false and distorted information, predominantly via social networks. Online threats (OT) can be categorised into two groups:

- OT spread via social media for the purposes of deception or fearmongering (fake news, disinformation, misinformation, malinformation, conspiracies, hoaxes, deepfake, deepvoice, etc.)
- OT spread via other communication channels to disrupt integrity or obtain data (malware, phishing, ransomware, honeytrap, tailgating, spoofing, etc.).

They can also be divided into traditional and modern online threats. Traditional OT include disinformation, misinformation, conspiracies, fake news, and hoaxes. New OT include deepfake, deepvoice, malinformation, honeytrap, or tailgating.

In media literacy, the ability to recognise and combat different online threats requires understanding of their characteristics.

3.1 Fake news

Fake news gained footing in the online media environment in many forms. Types of fake news are constantly evolving based on the availability of the technology used for their creation. Their emergence and adaptation are shaped by the economic, ideological, and political desire to influence the recipients. False information is often disseminated by people who are unable to correctly decode the information received, which is closely related to their level of media literacy (Kapec, 2023).

Cambridge Dictionary online defines fake news as “false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke”. They also include news articles that are deliberately and demonstrably untrue (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). In general, fake news aim to manipulate our perception of real facts, events, and statements; they are presented as news and their creator is aware that they are untrue.

According to Homańska (2023), fake news can negatively affect education in general and civic education specifically – they pose a great challenge for citizenship as such. False and misleading information can influence public opinions, create conflicts, and disrupt people’s trust in democratic institutions.

3.2 Disinformation

Disinformation is deliberately misleading information designed to influence public opinions (Homańska, 2023). Most frequently they occur on the internet but can also be identified in print. They are created by editing news from the internet or press agencies. This deliberately spread information is false or misleading and aimed to influence public opinions, polarise society, or disrupt trust in democratic institutions. In Slovakia in recent years, disinformation was linked mainly to the Covid-19 pandemic, elections, and other social and political events. The most frequently occurring type of disinformation is clickbait. Clickbait is a newspaper title, which “baits” the recipient to click on it. It aims to attract the recipient’s attention and trigger curiosity at all costs (Kapec, 2023).

Misinformation is a relatively new, related concept. Both mis- and disinformation spread false information. However, misinformation is a false or incorrect information spread unknowingly and without the intent to harm. The spreader of misinformation believes it is true and does not intend to lie. Incorrect information can be spread unintentionally often due to the failure to properly fact-check or cognitive distortions such as confirmation bias (ESET, 2021).

Malinformation is an even newer concept; it is defined as information based on true or real facts but disseminated with the intent to cause harm to an individual, organisation, or state.

For example, confidential or private information may be leaked and used to damage reputation or create conflict (NBÚ, n. d.). Malinformation is a specific category in which true information is made public with the intention to cause harm, unlike misinformation, which involves the unintentional dissemination of falsehoods, or disinformation, which is also false but spread deliberately.

3.3 Hoax

Hoax is a type of falsehood or fake news, which can also be perceived as a deceit, joke, or mystification. Inaccurate and misleading information is thus spread to manipulate people into holding false beliefs, often leading to significant physical, financial, and emotional harm (Šupšáková, 2013). In the online environment, hoaxes typically take the form of news stories warning about fabricated dangers. Hoaxes often include calls for further dissemination (Zajac, n.d.), which are intended to provide the recipient with certain benefits or to avert potential dangers (Kapec, 2023). They typically take the form of fearmongering chain messages.

Hoaxes are dangerous because they can cause panic, distrust, or hate toward specific groups of people or institutions. Since they can have serious implications for security and public order, they are often punishable by criminal law (Police of the Slovak Republic, 2022; Euractiv, 2019).

3.4 New and specific online threats

A new, very dangerous online threat is the deepfake. This term was coined by combining two English words: deep learning and fake. Deepfakes can take the form of an image, video, or sound (separately referred to as deepvoice) edited or generated by AI, which can depict both real and non-existent people. It is a type of synthetic medium (Kalpokas & Kalpokiene, 2022). Although the creation of false content itself is not new, deepfakes use technology, machine learning, and AI – including face-detection algorithms and artificial neural networks – in a unique way (Kietzmann, Lee, McCarthy & Kietzmann, 2020; Schwartz, 2018). Deepfakes attract a lot of attention because they can potentially be used to create material that harms a specific individual, group, or society (e.g. pornographic videos of famous or influential people, fake news, hoaxes, videos intended to bully someone, or material created for financial fraud).

New cyber threats form a specific category that seriously endangers not only individuals but society as a whole. Cyber threats mainly include structured attacks on system integrity (e.g. malware, phishing, ransomware) and social engineering, which exploits psychological manipulation to obtain sensitive information about individuals or organisations (e.g.

honeypots, tailgating). For a better understanding, see the following overview of their characteristics:

- Malware – short for malicious software. It is a harmful code of software, which damages, disrupts, or gains unauthorised access to computers systems, devices, or data. It can take different forms such as viruses, Trojan horses, worms, spyware, adware, or ransomware. It is spread via infected websites, email attachments, or malicious files with the intention of causing system damage, data theft, or extortion (NBÚ, n.d.). Malware that encrypts the victim’s data upon infecting the device and demands a ransom for their decryption is called ransomware. If the victim refuses to pay, they may lose their files or the whole system. Ransomware is one of the most frequent and most harmful malware forms.
- Phishing allows the attacker to illegally obtain sensitive data such as login information or credit card numbers by pretending to be a trusted person or institution, often using fake e-mails or websites (NBÚ, n.d.; ESET, 2024).
- Spoofing is a digital identity forgery technique – the attacker pretends to be a trusted entity (e.g., an email address, phone number, or website) in order to deceive the victim and gain access to sensitive data or cause harm (Giorgi, Saracino & Martinelli, 2020).

All these online threats are dangerous for individuals, society as a whole, institutions and organisations, and even the whole country. Therefore, it is necessary for individuals to develop media literacy and learn how to identify these threats, as well as the protective strategies to counter them.

4 MEDIA LITERACY AND THE ELIMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF ONLINE THREATS

Media literacy is the key tool for the elimination of online threats including fake news, disinformation, malware, phishing, ransomware, spoofing, and social engineering (honeypot, tailgating). It fosters the development of critical thinking, the ability to evaluate and verify information, recognise manipulation, and safely navigate the online environment.

In terms of the VEGA project No. 1/0523/23 *Media literacy as a means of eliminating the influence of fake news in adult civic education theory and practice*, several focus group meetings with young adults were held. These focus groups confirmed the importance of the development of media literacy. Safe and responsible behaviour in the online environment was identified as an inseparable aspect of media literacy. Media literacy is indispensable in the following areas:

Critical evaluation of sources and content

Media literacy teaches individuals how to distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy media, and how to identify fake news, disinformation, manipulation, and commercial content. It prevents spreading dis- and misinformation.

Fostering digital skills and security habits

It increases the ability to recognise phishing e-mails, fraud websites, dangerous messages and attachments, thus decreasing the risk of malware or ransomware infection. It teaches individuals to use security tools such as antivirus software, firewalls, two-factor authentication, and update regularly.

Conscious and responsible behaviour online

It promotes the ethical use of media, privacy and personal data protection, and resilience to social engineering (e.g. honeytraps, tailgating). It teaches how to recognise spoofing and other forms of identity forge.

Creative and analytical approach to media

Besides passive reception of information, it also develops one's ability to create media content and understand how media work and influence society.

Media literacy is a comprehensive approach that integrates education, technical skills, and ethical values to increase the resilience of both individuals and society to various online threats. Good practice examples include multiple initiatives, portals, and platforms addressing the development of media literacy, online safety, and elimination of online threats:

- International Media Education Centre (IMEC)
- portal Medialnavychova.sk [Media Education]
- platform Mediálna gramotnosť + [Media Literacy +]
- “Spolu pre zdravé médiá” [“Together for Healthy Media”] project
- portal “(Ne)bezpečne v sieti” [(Un)Safe in the Net]
- portal “Bezpečne na nete” [“Safe on the Internet”]
- portal overujsifakty.sk [Check Your Facts]

CONCLUSION

Media literacy is one of the vital competences in the digital age. It helps individuals deal with the information overload generated by the online environment safely and resist threats ranging from false messages to sophisticated cyberattacks. Investing in media education protects us from disinformation and provides a foundation for the development of responsible,

informed, and democratic citizenship in the 21st century. Increasingly, media literacy is seen as a key tool in combating the dissemination of disinformation and other online threats. Our digital society exists in an information environment oversaturated with content of varying quality and credibility; therefore, the ability to interpret and evaluate information is essential to protecting democratic values, individual security, and social stability.

Our VEGA project No. 1/0523/23 Media Literacy as a Means of Eliminating the Influence of Fake News in Adult Civic Education Theory and Practice shows that young adults recognise the need to develop media literacy, but they often lack practical tools and strategies to deal with online threats effectively. The focus groups showed that safe online behaviour and the ability to recognise online threats and respond to them appropriately were key areas of media literacy.

Research in Slovakia and abroad has shown that investing in media literacy significantly increases resilience to disinformation. A study of the European Commission of 2022 has identified a direct correlations between the media literacy level and one's ability to identify fake news. The research of the Stanford History Education Group (Wineburg et al., 2016) has shown that high school students are often unable to distinguish advertising from actual news, which implies an insufficient level of critical thinking.

The UNESCO Media and Information Literacy (MIL) framework emphasizes the need to integrate media literacy across all levels of educational and life-long learning. In Slovakia, there are several initiatives addressing this area (e.g. nedialnavychova.sk, overujsifakty.sk), which represents a significant step towards building systematic prevention against manipulation.

Media literacy must not be seen as merely an addition to the education system, as it is a fundamental life skill. Its development should be part of state educational policy and it should be implemented at schools, universities, community centres, and digital platforms. It is the only way for internet users to become responsible, critical, and media-competent citizens, able to face the challenges posed by the digital era.

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PARADIGMICAL ASPECTS OF SELF-EDUCATION OVER TIME

Hana Vavříková

***Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to look at self-education throughout history and to draw attention to the departure of contemporary Western society from the traditional educational paradigm, which was the basis of the concept of lifelong learning and education, and to its inclination towards a post-educational paradigm, which is characterized by the passive use of information from IT and a deepening lack of interest in self-education.*

***Keywords:** self-education, transformation of educational paradigms, decline in interest in self-education, passive use of information from the online space and from the media*

1 THE CHANGES IN AUTO-EDUCATION OVER TIME

For a long time, self-education was an integral part of lifelong learning and education and was based on the so-called educational paradigm (Jarvis, 1985), according to which people recognized the need to constantly learn or educate themselves. That educational paradigm always had two basic forms. It was a paradigm that emphasized individual development and a paradigm, self-help, which viewed humans as social beings. This paradigm is based on pedagogical anthropology, which views humans as homo educandus (Palouš, Svobodová, 2011) and homo socialis (Aristotle, 1979).

According to Lorenzová (2023), the aforementioned self-help in this case means the willingness and will of an individual, group or community to solve problems of individual and social life on the basis of education and development.

This self-help is based on sharing social values, social empathy, affiliation, caring interest in others and general dignity. These aspects represent, in a social sense, an important condition for an ethical life that stood and stands on the principle of the good for all (Dalai Lama, 2021)

1.1 Autoeducation in the past

For example, auto-education in the mythical era had a fundamental impact on survival. It was in prehistoric times that auto-education was closely linked to everyday life and the needs of the community. The content of auto-education was also the process of learning life skills and passing on knowledge from generation to generation. Younger individuals learned from older members of the community not only to hunt, but also to create the necessary tools, collect

certain crops, build a dwelling or make a fire. And an integral part of auto-education at that time was also axiologization, thanks to which people learned the values that a given society professed. The main self-education methods included observation and imitation, practical activities, and communication, which led to a generational transition of traditions, values, attitudes, and customs of a given community (Beneš, 2014).

In ancient Athens, an inscription directly related to the concept of self-education was placed above the entrance to the Temple of Apollo, namely "Γνῶθι σεαυτόν" (Gnóthi seautón), i.e. "Know thyself". It is clear that the meaning of this statement has evolved over time. Originally, the inscription could have meant "Know thy limits" or "Know thy destiny". Throughout history, the statement has been interpreted in many different ways, including studying the universe to understand oneself, and vice versa. Many Christian, Jewish and Muslim authors have found equivalents of this statement in their traditions for the study of oneself. (Janiš, 2009).

According to one of the most important Athenian philosophers, Socrates, the goal of self-education was self-improvement of the personality, including its moral aspect. Socrates was of the opinion that wisdom is a value standing at the very top of human existence, and that wisdom is a sign of the highest human honesty. This human wisdom can be seen in human actions such as fearlessness, and in the emotional area, a sign of human wisdom is the ability of a person to control their emotions or to respond adequately to various social situations. Socrates also emphasized the need for absolute truth. He naturally led his students to find that truth or its ultimate solution completely on their own and without help, because only in this way could they, in Socrates' opinion, remember and learn what was needed (Jůva and Jůva, 1997).

According to Socrates' student Platon, a person should accept the fact that "The highest idea is the idea of good, to which the idea of truth, the idea of beauty and the idea of justice are subordinate, and then other ideas, forming a coherent hierarchy of values", and that a person should actively participate in accepting this idea (Jůva, Veselá, 1988, p. 20). Platon emphasized that knowing oneself is the key to knowing the world and a virtuous life. According to Plato, one of the basic methods of self-knowledgement and self-education was through interaction with other people.

And the need for lifelong learning and self-education was also discussed in the ancient novel *The Education of Cyrus*; by Xenophanes of Ephesus, who lived in the 5th century BC (1936).

The basic methods of self-education since ancient times include the interview method, the self-reflection method or the introspection method, the method of obtaining feedback

or implementing such activities and trying out such social situations that can reveal unknown aspects of our personality. According to the philosophers of that time, self-education could help a person, through learning about various areas of life, to look at their own behavior and their own decisions from a more objective perspective. Deeper self-knowledge can lead to greater self-acceptance, to strengthening self-confidence, to understanding one's own values. Habitual motivation and deliberate preference for various goals can lead us to better decisions; both in public, personal or professional life. Self-knowledge and self-education thus represent an important process leading to personal growth and a sense of fulfillment.

Throughout history, paradigms of self-knowledge and self-education have appeared in various contexts. In modern Europe, the principle of "know thyself" was espoused by German philosophy and literature (e.g. Kant, Hegel, Goethe). And the idea of "know thyself" is also included in some of Comenius' educational goals. Comenius in his work *Vševýchova* (1992) demands that a person, within the framework of education, should know himself and the world and masters himself. And the given concept of self-knowledge was developed by Freud in his publication *On Man and Culture* (1990), when he focused on how a person should approach the culture in which he lives. And the requirement for self-directed learning, which is based on docility, was formulated, for example, by M. S. Knowles (1984). The mentioned concept of self-directed learning is based on aspects of self-concept, experience, readiness, ability to learn, or motivation to learn.

In the modern Knowledge Society or knowledge society, knowledge was a key value and the functional areas of this society were dependent on knowledge. Learning in the Knowledge Society was essentially represented by the overarching concept of the so-called lifelong learning, which required being constantly ready to learn. At that time, the above-mentioned motto "Know thyself" was often used in the sense of psychological self-examination and self-knowledge. It was a call to a deeper understanding of one's own thoughts, emotions and motivations, to one's own self-knowledge and self-development (Petrušek, 2006).

2 SELF- EDUCATION TODAY

One could assume that even today the idea of self-knowledge is still relevant and that it is important for personal growth and self-development. Whether we understand it, in the original sense of "know your limits" or in the sense of "know your soul". The principle of "know yourself" should encourage us to think more deeply about ourselves and the place we occupy in the world. But this is not always the case. What is the reason for this?

2.1 Transformation of Western Society

Since the Enlightenment, Western civilization has believed that a person's personal development will go hand in hand with intellectual knowledge and the development of science. It is clear that contemporary Western society is not only rich, but also culturally advanced. On the other hand, it is clear that we often do not use the aforementioned sophistication of society even in the most general sense. Sociologists (e.g. Chossudovsky, 2022) point out, for example, that although we live in an era that boasts high culture and where there is plenty of everything, despite this, there are a large number of people who are hungry, who have nowhere to sleep or who do not receive sufficient health, social or educational care. Thanks to this, even in today's world, there are illiterate or otherwise destitute people who are unable or cannot help themselves. And what is worse; their environment often cannot or does not want to help them either. This is despite the fact that the contemporary world offers people various possibilities of social support and support, education and self-education. But experts (e.g. Hloušková, 2014) point out the fact that many people do not have this need for personal growth and personal potential, through self-education. According to sociologists (Lipovetsky, 2011), this is why indifference and mutual alienation of people are manifested in the contemporary world. The contemporary post-moralistic society is typical of a decrease in its moral literacy, which is reflected in the struggles of individual cultures, ethnicities and nations. This is also why Western society is accompanied by extremism, a state where people hardly trust each other.

2.2 Shift from education to information acquisition

Today we live in the so-called Information Society, for which digital processing, transmission and storage of information are essential. Information management is then an important characteristic influencing not only the economic activities of such a society, because thanks to the availability of information it has brought about the streamlining of decision-making and management activities (Jonák, 2003). It can be said that with the development of technology and the Internet, self-education has become more accessible and dynamic. Individuals today have the opportunity to use a wide range of online courses, educational platforms and digital resources. It could therefore be assumed that self-education will play an increasingly important role in our lifelong education, that the emphasis will be placed on the development of skills for orientation in a large amount of information, on critical thinking, creativity and adaptability, on a constantly changing world. (Knotková, 2022)

However, the current situation shows that Western society is gradually changing its view of lifelong learning, and therefore education, and that Western society is gradually moving from an educational paradigm to a post-educational paradigm (Robinson, 2010), which is accompanied by a transition from knowledge to information acquisition. This is because information technology, the Internet, AI are becoming a common tool that can answer people's questions and provide them with the information they need.

Therefore, the question is obvious? Why learn and self-educate? For many people, it is useless to learn new things - they increasingly rely on Internet resources, on artificial intelligence. There is a decline in functional literacy. Functional skills of reading, writing and arithmetic are being lost, they are not needed, AI can do everything in a fraction of the time - without effort, without the need to learn. However, scientists point out that our passive work with information and technological resources fundamentally undermines and negatively affects our cognition. And our knowledge is also changing. Knowledge can be considered that which strengthens the ability of its bearer to perform intellectual and manual activities, knowledge strongly concentrates the cognitive capacity of its bearer. Knowledge, as we traditionally understand it, i.e. especially "scientific knowledge", undergoes demanding verification and falsification procedures.

Information, on the other hand, is something that structures and formats a set of data that remains passive, inert, until it is used as knowledge, that is, until it is interpreted (David, Forayová – 2002). Their existence is totally dependent on the existence of the technologies by which they are created or in which they are stored.

According to Petrusek (2005), the problem lies in the fact that information is excluded from the above procedures and its practical functioning is its existential *conditio sine qua non*.

And the reproduction of knowledge and information is also related to the above. While information is reproduced essentially mechanically – it can be used without being actively handled and without becoming part of knowledge, the acquisition of knowledge represents a more demanding cognitive, thoroughly human process. At the same time, we can already observe the negative impacts of the given situation on our functional literacy and human intelligence, on the ability to use critical thinking and on our information literacy. Let's take a closer look at some of the above aspects:

1 Functional literacy and AI

Artificial intelligence has become accessible and easy to use. This leads to the risk of its unethical misuse. We encounter plagiarism and cheating in schools. Students and users of

all ages use these technologies to create school papers, essays or other texts that they pass off as their own, without putting any real intrapsychic educational effort into them. This problem disrupts the educational process and devalues the work of those who perform their tasks honestly. In addition, situations arise when AI is abused even in a professional environment, for example to create fake documents or to copy professional texts, which can have serious impacts on academic and professional integrity. The use of artificial intelligence for plagiarism and "cheating" in the Czech environment has already been demonstrated by studies: *Czech Schools and Artificial Intelligence (2023)* and *Czech Students and Artificial Intelligence (2024)*

2 Technology and the human brain

The human brain needs stimulation and regular challenges to stay strong and functional. Evolutionarily, we survived by having to deal with complex problems and find solutions to them. The brain is literally programmed to cope with difficult tasks. But when we let it rest, it gradually starts to lose its ability to work effectively. Simply put - we start to become stupid. For example, AI makes this process easier for us. There is no need to think long about complex calculations, write essays or remember a lot of facts. AI will do it for us, and we suddenly have more free time. But the time we used to spend solving problems, training our thinking and self-education is now disappearing. Passive work with information can have a negative impact on our cognitive functions - that is, if we allow technologies to replace our thinking and take over most of our mental work (Dušková, 2025).

3 Media and information literacy

The media has become part of the work, socialization, and educational process. People are constantly exposed to various media content and messages. And despite the fact that they live surrounded by the media world, misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations of information and content often occur. An individual should be able to process information from media messages and further handle them "primarily it is the ability to analyze the messages offered, assess their credibility and evaluate their communication intention, or associate them with other messages." (NPI, 2025) And other research (e.g. UPOL, 2023) shows that people do not use information literacy, that many people accept the information offered uncritically, that after searching for it, it is no longer verified and compared, that there is a lack of creative work with the information searched for, as well as its use in further education and in practical life. Liessmann has previously stated in this context that "information

alone is not enough and knowledge that stands above information is necessary to assess information” (2008, p. 23). It is therefore questionable whether this technologically conditioned situation will result in illiteracy (Liessmann, 2008)

3 PARADIGMATIC ASPECTS OF SELF- EDUCATION IN THE FUTURE

The meaning of self-education can be observed in connection with the above at least on two levels, through two paradigms.

The first paradigm of self-education perceived in this way emphasizes *its social, value potential*. According to Pelcová (2000), the goal of axiologically oriented education and self-education should also be the integration of the individual into society and his/her anchoring in it. According to the aforementioned author (2000), it is necessary that the content of self-education should not only include general knowledge, skills and abilities, but also that the culture of humanity and tradition should be transmitted through it, so that a person is able to fulfill various social roles through socially predicted actions. Self-education set up in this way should be one of the permanent tools of the process of humanization of a person, because it is thanks to this creative and active process that a person consciously participates in his/her own development and evolution. The goal of value-oriented self-education should therefore be the conscious humanization of a person, which also cultivates his or her own identity. Our positive concept of oneself and the surrounding world is primarily manifested in the fact that an individual behaves genuinely, honestly and fairly, that he or she has prosocial behavior and actions, a willingness to cooperate, collaborate or discuss, that he or she is able to consider and accept other individuals and their values, opinions or the inspiration they offer. In connection with the above, experts (e.g. Hábl, 2010) state that humanization should be one of the key principles of the transformation of the current Czech educational system. The importance of this requirement arises not only from the specific situation in which the current Czech educology finds itself, but also from the entire Czech liberal-oriented society.

The second paradigm takes into account its personal, *educational concept in self-education*. Self-education focused in this way should be focused on the development of the individual in terms of knowledge, skills or competences. The aim of self-education conceived in this way is also the development of the individual's personal attitudes, interests, needs and behaviour in such a way that the individual is able to independently develop his or her personality. In connection with the above, one of the educational goals of self-education also appears to be the ability to analyse received information, critically evaluate and internalise it and subsequently approach problem solving creatively. And the key goal of this educationally

conceived self-education is also the ability to consciously learn and expand and deepen one's knowledge, skills and competences; and this at all levels of one's personality.

CONCLUSION

This article looked at self-education and its selected aspects throughout history, from the perspective of various educational paradigms. The article mentioned in particular the paradigm of lifelong learning and education, which has been built on the so-called educational paradigm for centuries. However, the article also mentioned the so-called post-educational paradigm, which is spreading especially with the development of information technology, the Internet, various social networks and the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AS AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH TO THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

Viktória Pančíková

Abstract: *Self-directed learning represents an effective approach to the professional development of teachers, supporting both their personal and professional growth. This theoretical study focuses on the connection between current challenges in education and the need to strengthen teachers' ability to manage their learning independently. Self-directed learning is compared with formal adult education, and its benefits as well as potential risks are analyzed. The study identifies key prerequisites for effective self-directed learning, such as docility, self-regulation, and the meaningfulness of learning goals and content. The paper concludes with questions for professional discussion and recommendations for andragogical practice aimed at developing the teaching profession.*

Keywords: *teacher, school, professional development, self-directed learning, learning needs, self-regulation, docility.*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of the professional development of teachers (all pedagogical and professional employees of schools and school facilities), we normally encounter a legislatively conditioned system of further education. The currently valid legislative regulation, Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical Employees and Professional Employees and on Amendments to Certain Acts, states in Section 40, paragraph 3 that the professional development of teaching is carried out through education, creative activity (especially scientific, research, publishing or artistic), and self-education and the performance of work activities.

The aforementioned Act 138/2019 Coll. in Section 42 defines the types of (formal) education: qualification, functional, specialization, adaptation, pre-attestation, innovation, and updating. Some types are compulsory (adaptation and updating), others are a condition for obtaining or maintaining a position (e.g., specialisation and functional), and some can be perceived as voluntary, but teachers receive a professional development bonus (namely innovative education) for their completion.

Act 138/2019 Coll. directly mentions self-education (author's note: we perceive self-

education as a form of adult development, the basic prerequisite of which is the ability to regulate the process of self-learning, i.e., the ability to manage self-learning) as a regular way of professional development. The question remains how to implement it effectively and how to recognize or control its results. In the translated study, we primarily focus on the need for guided self-learning at the present time, the analysis of self-learning in terms of its benefits and risks, and recommendations for andragogical practice.

1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CURRENT PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION AND THE NEED FOR TEACHERS' SELF-LEARNING

The Slovak education system is currently trying to deal with many challenges that arise from the current times and interfere with education. Selected challenges and problems can be divided into three imaginary categories. Still persistent problems such as socio-pathological phenomena, pupils from unstimulating environments, the impact of social networks on education, etc. In the second category - current problems, we include, for example, the curricular reform of primary schools, the introduction of an inclusive approach, and the lack of teachers. The last category consists of problems that we perceive as highly topical. In this area, the most serious problems are: deteriorating mental health of pupils, the impact of artificial intelligence on educational processes and media illiteracy, as well as the absence or low level of critical thinking (for more details, see Pančíková, 2024).

The teacher needs to respond to these challenges and problems with his or her further development. We call such a reaction learning. As stated by B. Kosová (2009), learning occurs when the organism actively adapts to its environment in the form of a change in behavior. In a narrower perception, according to the author, learning can be understood as a quantitative change in knowledge, skills, habits, abilities and attitudes. The result is a relatively permanent change in knowledge, experience, behavior, and performance.

From the above, it follows that through the processes of learning and self-learning, we can respond to changes in the environment. Not only for changes, but also for requirements, problems, challenges, etc., and thus for the learning needs that have arisen. The issue of defining teachers' learning needs can be viewed from several angles. However, we are inclined to the view of learning needs presented by I. Pavlov et al. (2021). The authors define the areas of learning needs in the professional development of teaching in a broader context and state that the teacher responds to individual learning needs, then to the needs of a professional group, school and school facility, region, state in the context of current educational policy, and finally to learning needs resulting from society-wide events. These are learning needs understood from

the micro level – the teacher as an individual, to the macro level – society as a whole (national and supranational tendencies and trends). We perceive learning needs conceived in this way at two basic levels, namely the needs in the sense of deficit (what the teacher needs for his practice) and in the sense of proactive need (in which direction the teacher wants to develop further).

It follows from the above that there is a direct relationship between society-wide events and the need for professional development of teachers. As we stated in the introduction to this study, the development of teaching can be implemented in several ways – primarily by formal, legislatively regulated education in the system of professional development of teaching, then by creative activity and self-education. Which way is most effective is polemical. Subsequently, for this reason, we focus on the comparison of formal education and self-learning.

1.1 Comparison of formal education and self-learning

In terms of the content of the study, we will focus on the comparison of formally perceived teacher education - education defined by legislation and self-learning. Both of these methods have their advantages or strengths and their risks, which we list in T1.

As part of the comparison of both modes of education, we would like to draw attention to two important indicators: *flexibility* and *professional guidance*. While we perceive professional guidance as the domain of formal education, it is its absence that seems to be the greatest risk in self-learning. The absence of professional guidance is closely related to the risk of acquiring unsubstantiated and false information in the information overload, including disinformation and misinformation. It also limits feedback for the learner, and the learner in such a case must (should) be able to self-reflect and use autodidactic procedures.

T1 Comparison of formal education and self-learning

Formal education	Self-learning
<i>Strengths</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional guidance and professional guarantor of education (accreditation, authorization to provide education). • Systematic, clear structure. • Interaction with the lecturer, feedback for the learning participant. • Verified sources and literature. • Obtaining an official certificate or certificate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility. • A multitude of options and resources, availability. • Lower costs. • Autonomy of the learner. • Adaptation to one's own learning needs and pace – individualisation and personalisation of content and methods. • Mostly the internal motivation of the participant.

<i>Risks</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The system is not flexible. • Often external motivation, possible duty. • Low participant autonomy. • Reduced possibility of individualization and personalization of learning content. • Usually higher costs associated with education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of professional guidance, risk of acquiring harmful and unsubstantiated information and procedures. • Absence of feedback. • Possible impassability or low ability of controlled self-learning requires the ability to self-regulate learning. • As a rule, the results are not recognized or difficult to recognize.

Source: own processing

On the other hand, self-learning is significantly flexible, unlike formal education, which is more rigid. Accreditation processes are usually time-consuming, making it impossible to respond immediately to the newly created teaching needs of teachers. Self-learning, ideally guided self-learning, is characterized by its flexibility and the fact that it generally responds to real learning needs (not "pro forma" learning needs).

In this context, interesting results are brought by V. Laššák et al. (2022, p. 12), who, as part of the research activities of the National Project TEACHERS, focused, among other things, on evaluating the effectiveness of selected forms of teacher education from their point of view. The results of the survey show that the first places (over 70%) were occupied by full-time forms of education. 69.07% of respondents described the combined form as effective. For us, the significant results in terms of the focus of our study are that 46.74% of respondents stated that self-education online according to their own plan was effective, and also 29.90% of respondents stated the distance form in the form of self-study as an effective form of professional development.

We understand that self-education online according to one's own plan cannot be equated with guided self-learning, but the results of the research are encouraging in the sense that self-education is an effective way of self-development for almost half of the respondents, which creates a prerequisite for mastering and incorporating guided self-learning into the professional and personal development of teachers.

2 GUIDED SELF-LEARNING AS PART OF THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS

Guided self-learning according to T. H. Morris (2019) is a basic competence of an adult that provides the ability to adapt to constantly changing and complex social conditions. According to the author, everyone can benefit from guided self-learning, and at the same time,

it becomes an essential competence for a successful life and work in the modern world. The main benefits of managed self-learning in terms of acquired competence include preventing the obsolescence of knowledge and skills, improving qualifications, facilitating progress, and promoting long-term career success.

However, guided self-learning is not a matter of course for adults or pedagogical and professional employees of schools and school facilities. This competence needs to be acquired and, in a certain sense, developed. In order to be able to effectively manage self-learning, a person should meet certain prerequisites. The most important are the ability to learn, the ability to self-regulate, the meaningfulness of learning goals and content, and the ability to manage one's learning process (autodidactics).

2.1 Prerequisites for self-directed learning

Achievement in its essence represents the ability to learn, but also the readiness to learn, to receive new knowledge, abilities, and skills. It is active, intentional, conscious, and (self-)reflective learning, which is based on the willingness to develop. In the context of professional development, achievement is a basic prerequisite for growth, as it allows the teacher to react flexibly to changes and critically reflect on their own practice.

"The following are important for the study of achievement from an andragogical point of view: the previous experiences of an adult (the results of learning processes, the adopted learning strategies, etc.), the complex psychological equipment of a person for learning (innate, acquired, manifested psychic processes and characteristics); personality setting (self-motivation, self-knowledge, self-regulation, self-fulfillment, ideals and values), and factors stimulating a person's learning from the outside (as a complex of stimuli, opportunities and life activities supporting self-development)" (Pavlov – Neupauer 2018, p. 27). According to the authors M. Schubert et al. (2021), of the relatively wide set of factors that affect adult attainment, motivation, self-regulation, and cognitive functions such as memory and attention seem to be the most important.

Self-regulation is closely related to the meaningfulness of learning objectives and content. We are inclined to A. Bontová (2017), who states that the willingness to actively regulate one's own learning is supported by the meaningfulness of learning, learning content and goals. The concepts of meaningful learning and self-directed learning need to be understood in relation to each other. Both concepts tend to characterize learning that is intentional and whose meaning is obvious to the learner. In such learning, an individual can answer the questions: what is being learned, why is it being learned, and how is it being learned. He learns

intentionally, thoughtfully, manages his learning processes, and pursues his goal.

The above prerequisites smoothly lead us to autodidactics. We perceive autodidactics as a "theory of self-education", i.e., as a set of principles, approaches, procedures, strategies, and attitudes that enable an adult to purposefully, independently, and responsibly manage and evaluate their learning process without external guidance.

Self-education as a form of education and professional development, the basic prerequisite of which is the feasibility of managed self-learning, is legislatively declared in Slovakia. However, we can state that it is not sufficiently appreciated, in contrast to formally perceived teacher education. The undeniable advantage of controlled self-learning of teachers is its flexibility, but on the other hand, the risk is the absence of professional guidance.

Effective controlled self-learning assumes the ability to learn (*docilita*), the ability to regulate learning (self-regulation), and the ability to implement and evaluate learning (autodidactics). Managed self-learning competence cannot be considered automatic, but needs to be developed in order to eliminate the risks we pointed out in T1.

This is where the space for andragogical intervention comes in, which should support the acquisition and development of the competence of controlled self-learning in adults, including pedagogical and professional employees of schools and school facilities.

CONCLUSION

In an era of rapid social and technological change, the ability to learn continuously is a so-called meta-competence for professional stability and innovative practice. A teacher who masters the principles of autodidactics and has acquired the competence of controlled self-learning can respond flexibly to changing needs, whether their own or those of pupils, the school environment, or the educational system. Guided self-learning is a regular part of the professional development of teachers, and it is necessary due to the speed of time and changing conditions. From the above, several questions for professional discussion arise for andragogical practice.

In particular, it is about how to develop the competence of guided self-learning, how to ensure that self-learning is a really integral and valuable part of the system of professional development of teachers, how to eliminate its risks, and especially how to support the development of critical thinking of teaching in order to support the processes of self-learning and self-education.

These rhetorical questions are relatively difficult to answer. However, from the point of view of the author of the study, as an active lecturer and practically in adult education, the

acquisition and development of the competence of controlled self-learning of teaching can be implemented through formal education, where the lecturer (educator) has the direct possibility of the following intervention:

- change or transform their position as a lecturer as a transmitter of learning content into a facilitator of the learning process (if appropriate).
- to convey information leading to an understanding and understanding of learning processes and to emphasise the meaningfulness of learning and its importance for quality of life.
- to include self-reflective activities in education in the sense of identifying one's own learning needs and looking for ways to satisfy them, i.e., to support participants in learning how to identify learning needs, evaluate them, set their own learning goals, plan, implement, and evaluate their learning.
- and, last but not least, to support the use of digital tools for self-learning, in connection with the development of media literacy and the development of critical thinking.

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Zákon č. 138/2019 Z. z. o pedagogických zamestnancoch a odborných zamestnancoch a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov.

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THE CONTRIBUTION OF DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS OF TEACHING AND SPECIALIZED EDUCATIONAL STAFF IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPROVING EDUCATION

Marian Majzlík

Abstract: *The development of communication skills among teaching and specialized educational staff represents a crucial factor in improving the quality of education in contemporary schools. This study analyzes the impact of systematically developing both verbal and nonverbal communication competencies on the educational process and teacher-student interactions. Empirical research has identified key areas where improved communication significantly contributes to more effective learning, the creation of a positive classroom climate, and the prevention of conflicts. The findings suggest that targeted training in communication skills enhances not only teachers' pedagogical effectiveness but also students' socio-emotional development.*

Keywords: *communication, education, emotions, feelings, emotions, needs, climate, conflict, effectiveness.*

INTRODUCTION

What role does the quality of communication play in a rapidly changing educational environment? The current school environment is facing increasing challenges. Digitization is changing the demands on the way of teaching and communication. Its negative impacts in recent years have fundamentally affected the mental health of pupils, who are increasingly vulnerable. Communication in the school environment should eliminate these impacts, contribute to more effective learning, create a positive climate in the classroom and prevent conflicts.

In this context, communication at school goes far beyond the established narrative that perceives communication as an exchange of information. It becomes a tool for creating a safe environment at school, trust and a favorable climate. The way in which pedagogical staff and professional staff communicate affects pupils' desire to learn, engage in activities, increases pupils' self-confidence, and interferes with pupils' intrinsic motivation.

The acquired communication skills of staff lead to a better understanding of the needs of the current generation of pupils as well as a particular pupil. This understanding determines

the prerequisites for a thoughtful, understandable and effective transmission of the communication message. For this reason, our goal is to point out the benefits of the education of staff for their professional activities in this issue.

1 DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES OF THE PRESENT TIME

According to V. Pančíková (2024), the current educational environment faces several challenges that we have not often encountered in the past. She included the negative impacts of digitalization and deteriorating mental health among them. These are phenomena between which, according to experts studying the impacts of technology on human brain function, there is a clear connection. These include J. Stránský (2024), who states that digitization has significantly affected the evolution of the human brain in recent decades, as it changes the way of thinking and affects mental health, among other things. It causes weakening of the brain centers that control logical thinking, the ability to plan, and make decisions. Secondly, it also affects our feelings, emotions, and needs. The ability to perceive and express them decreases, which leads to feelings of misunderstanding of the meaning of one's own existence.

These facts are also one of the factors influencing the achievement of pupils' educational results. Changes in the structure of the brain cannot be overlooked. From a biological point of view, the human brain is a controlling organ. Any change in this part of the human organism is reflected in the interaction with the outside world. In the school environment, this can be seen in various indicators, e.g., a negative trend in the areas of education manifested in the failure of logical and critical thinking.

Eliminating this trend presupposes the acquisition of new professional competencies in the field of communication with regard to the reflection of current knowledge about the human brain. Facing these challenges today means taking advantage of the current possibilities of supporting several participating entities. The Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic, in cooperation with the Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology within the National Project of Mental Health and Prevention, approached the solution with a comprehensive proposal of measures. Managing an unfavorable situation also brings the possibility of using the system of continuous education, peer learning, as well as the potential of mentoring in the school environment, as described by V. Pančíková (2024). The intersection of all approaches leading to problem-solving in the school environment is a change in the communication of the main actors of the school.

Understanding the current situation is an elementary prerequisite for supporting internal

motivation leading to a change in the way of communication. It contributes to the willingness to systematically develop verbal and non-verbal communication competencies with an impact on the educational process and the interaction between teachers and pupils. On the contrary, misunderstanding does not lead to change, which in practice is reflected in persistence in established communication stereotypes. A. M. Alkaabi (2023) draws attention to this fact, describing a picture of a practice in which, despite the boom in continuous education, teachers persist in established practices. For this reason, more attention needs to be paid to the issue.

2 COMMUNICATION IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION

Communication in the school environment is a determining framework for creating a favorable school climate. The school management has an irreplaceable role in the process of forming good relationships in the school team. In practice, according to the research findings of M. Majzlík (2017), this is reflected in the level of frustration of school employees. In schools with a higher level of helpfulness and engagement of the school head and a lower level of directive approaches applied on his part, the level of teacher frustration is lower. A low level of frustration and a sense of security increased the level of willingness and commitment of teachers in their work, which was characterized by a high work ethic, joy of work, and enthusiasm in achieving the jointly set goals of the school.

These research findings correspond to information about the human psyche in connection with the satisfaction of basic needs of both teachers and pupils. Basic needs include the need for security. By satisfying this need, according to M. Kline (2020), the activity of those parts of the brain that control verbal expression, thinking, and reasoning in both teachers and students improves. The requirement to create a safe school environment is therefore crucial for a favourable climate. The aforementioned author also says that the so-called problem behavior of the pupil is in fact a plea for help related to his unmet needs. It manifests itself in the pupil's emotions, behaviour, and willingness to fulfil their tasks. In order for the teacher to be able to correctly evaluate and respond to these situations, he needs to acquire the necessary knowledge and new competencies in the field of mapping the emotions and needs of the student.

Like us, several other authors, such as F. Zheng (2022), A. Binnliff et al. (2025), recommend communicating in the school environment in such a way that the needs of students are perceived and satisfied. In relation to creating a supportive learning environment and achieving the desired results for pupils, this is another important factor. By perceiving the pupil's feelings, an assumption is created that the teacher can realistically support the pupil in

the areas he needs. Such communication makes pupils feel accepted and supported. Their emotional and social needs are met. By perceiving pupils' experiences, teachers are able to offer them intervention in the form of compassionate action if necessary.

The teacher's ability to identify the feelings and needs of pupils has several benefits from the point of view of education. If the teacher knows the needs of the student, the likelihood that he will be able to attract him so that he can work in the lesson increases. He/she is able to choose appropriate communication strategies, methods, and forms of work, reflecting his/her needs. It is difficult to support the pupil's intrinsic motivation to learn if we cannot find out what the pupil feels and needs.

Correctly perceiving, recognizing, and evaluating the feelings, feelings, and needs of another person is not an easy task for pedagogical and professional employees of schools and school facilities. According to authors M. L. Houser and L. Waldbuesser (2016), this is mainly because teachers assume a mirror of their behavior. This assumption prevents understanding.

Despite the occurrence of possible difficulties, we perceive a change in communication with an emphasis on the perception of our own and our partner's feelings and needs as a necessary step. According to G. Neufeld (2012), a significant part of the current generation of young people has a reduced ability to perceive and adequately express their feelings and emotions due to the negative impacts of digitization, which has consequences for their mental health. He drew attention to this fact in 2012 in his speech to the European Parliament. Since then, the situation has worsened. For this reason, one of the most effective solutions in addressing the negative impacts of digitalization in the field of mental health is to choose communication strategies that support the development of the ability to perceive one's feelings and needs, as well as the feelings and needs of one's communication partners.

2.1 Nonviolent communication and its contribution to school practice

The concept of Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was developed by the American psychologist and mediator Marshall B. Rosenberg in the 1960s. He shaped his approach to communication during his work on racial integration projects in various types of schools in the USA. His goal was to create a way of communication that would promote empathy and understanding between people. In 1984, he founded the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC), which encouraged the expansion of his approach outside the United States.

We can get acquainted with the concept and experience of Marshall B. Rosenberg through several publications that have been translated into several languages, including Czech. Most recently, his publication *Nonviolent Communication at School* (2023) was translated.

The contribution of Marshall B. Rosenberg's communication concept to school practice is obvious. Despite the fact that it was developed at a time when there were no problems related to the impacts of digitalization or deteriorating mental health. The basis of this communication concept is an empathetic perception of oneself and the communication partner. Based on empathic perception, it is possible to identify feelings and needs and express them appropriately in communication. According to M. B. Rosenberg (2023), nonviolent communication has four components:

1. Observation
2. Feelings
3. Needs
4. Intercession.

Through empathic perception, the communicator expresses what he or she is observing without evaluation when necessary. In the same way, he perceives his feelings, which are an indicator of satisfied or unmet needs, and expresses them. Subsequently, he also expresses his communication demands, which M. B. Rosenberg (2023) names as pleas. In a similar way, in nonviolent communication through empathy, what the communication partner observes as expressing his view of the surrounding reality is perceived. From communicative expressions, his feelings, needs, requests and their way of expression are identified.

In practice, it turns out that non-violent communication brings high efficiency in the level of understanding. It contributes to the creation of a favorable climate in collectives and to the proper function of the brain in individuals. It improves relationships between employees, between teachers and parents. The concept of M. B. Rosenberg brings instructions on how to withstand emotionally tense situations and how to resolve conflicts. He also names the part of normal communication that he does not recommend using. He calls it unstimulating communication, which includes, for example, moralizing, comparing, and commanding. It is a communication that turns out to be ineffective from the perspective of time. In addition, it is involved in the emergence of negative feelings, thoughts, and is a frequent cause of conflicts. Its use can take a toll on an individual's overall health.

The author of this study also has shared experience with the use of this concept. Within the system of education in professional development of staff, based on the authorization issued by the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic, he is a lecturer of innovative education according to Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical Employees and Professional Employees. Hundreds of pedagogical employees have already completed the training. During the final evaluation interviews, the participants of the training

positively evaluated the contribution of this education to their practice. These positives are reflected in their verbal expressions, but also in the evaluation questionnaires. They feel the greatest benefits in the quality of communication with pupils, parents, colleagues, which, according to them, is positively reflected in the climate of the classroom, school, in the degree of prevention and management of conflicts, but also in the quality of pupils' understanding of the curriculum. Feedback from teachers on the benefits of nonviolent communication for their practice depends on individual factors – the degree of willingness to change communication, the degree of understanding, the predisposition to perceive empathetically, and others.

CONCLUSION

In the presented study, we tried to point out the benefits of developing communication skills of police officers and civic associations in the context of improving the quality of education. We pointed out the benefits of communication, perceiving feelings, and needs on the part of the police and the civic association. The positive consequences of this communication are reflected in several factors – in the climate in the school environment, in the communication between the police and the civic association towards pupils, colleagues and parents, it contributes to the proper functioning of the brain, it has an impact on the elimination of the negative impacts of digitalisation in the field of mental health. The degree of effectiveness of positive impacts is influenced by the individual factors of the communicating police officers and civic associations related to their determination to change their communication.

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UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

Milan Chmura

Abstract: *Digital technologies are playing an increasingly important role in higher education, not only from the perspective of students, but also from that of teachers themselves. A key aspect of the effective use of these tools is the ability of university teachers to adapt to technological changes and develop their own self-directed learning. This scientific study aims to determine how university teachers' attitudes toward digital technologies influence their readiness for self-directed learning.*

Keywords: *university teacher, attitude, digital technology, self-directed learning*

1 UNIVERSITY TEACHERS IN THE DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Over the past two decades, digital technologies (DT) have become an integral part of higher education and have significantly transformed both the form of teaching and the expectations placed on educators. Although initially new digital tools were integrated rather slowly and on a voluntary basis (Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021), global events over the past six years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the launch of ChatGPT, have acted as an accelerator, forcing university teachers to make greater use of them.

Universities support DT-assisted teaching, and teachers can work with a wide range of tools. These include applications for visualising curriculum content, gamification, supporting student collaboration, and engaging with the Internet and social networks, among others. Key innovations include artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as MagicSchool.ai and Gradescope, which enable personalised teaching, automation of administrative tasks, and provide data-driven insights to improve educational outcomes. Another significant advance is represented by advanced assessment platforms such as Kahoot, Mentimeter, and Quizizz, which have become even more interactive and user-friendly in recent years. They provide instant feedback, detailed analytical data, and encourage active student participation in the learning process. In the area of collaborative learning, new platforms such as Microsoft Education and improved versions of Google Classroom focus on supporting teamwork through integrated features for resource sharing, group projects, and interactive real-time discussions. Hybrid and distance

learning technologies are also evolving rapidly, thanks in particular to tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, which now offer advanced features for classroom management, breakout rooms, and integration with other learning platforms. New generations of administrative tools, such as Attendance Radar and PowerSchool, focus on streamlining attendance management, assessment, and communication between teachers and students (Yuskovych-Zhukovska et al., 2022; Alkan, 2024; Černý, 2018; Černý, 2023).

As can be seen, the presence of DT and its implementation in the education process places increasing emphasis on the level of digital competence of university teachers. It is becoming a key prerequisite for effective teaching, especially in the context of current technological developments, which fundamentally change the ways in which education is delivered and information is accessed. Similarly, we can perceive the level of a teacher's digital competence as an essential part of supporting and developing their own professional competences. Although digital competence is not explicitly mentioned in teacher competence models, it has gradually found its place. For example, it is mentioned in connection with the digital environment in which learning takes place, or the ability to use information and communication technologies (ICT) didactically to support learning and teaching (Vašutová, 2004; Blašková et al., 2014; Bauman et al., 2023; Alberti et al., 2023).

The implementation of technology in education is now seen as part of a broader effort to improve the quality of higher education (Liu et al., 2020), which is also increasingly understood as being orientated towards the needs and active involvement of students (Kember & Kwan, 2000; Mubarak et al., 2022; Vojteková et al., 2023). This change requires teachers to adopt new approaches to content, interaction with students, and pedagogical planning. However, research shows that although the technological competencies of university teachers tend to be of a relatively high level, their pedagogical skills related to the didactically thoughtful use of technology lag behind. In practice, this means that university teachers are very good at working with and operating technological devices and using their applications, but using them to achieve didactic goals tends to be more problematic (Almerich et al., 2016). As a result, many teachers perceive e-learning as a source of uncertainty rather than an opportunity for innovation. They often even feel resistance to using new technologies (Downing & Dymont, 2013; Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021).

However, complicated the use of DT in education may seem, Jans and Awouters (2009) summed it up simply 15 years ago when they defined teachers' ICT competencies in three dimensions: (1) the teacher knows what educational activities ICT can be used for (awareness);

(2) the teacher has the necessary skills to use hardware and software (readiness); and (3) the teacher understands the pedagogical and didactic aspects of ICT.

1.1 Attitudes of university teachers towards digital technologies

An international scientific project IRNet conducted in 2016 focussing on the implementation of electronic educational tools in the university environment provided valuable insights into the extent and manner of ICT use in the teaching process. The study was carried out at the University of Silesia in Cieszyn (PL) and the University of Ostrava (CZ) and included data from 86 academic staff members. The results showed that: (1) Academics' attitudes towards the use of ICT tools in teaching are predominantly positive; (2) The extent of ICT use is not influenced by age, but rather by academics' IT skills; (3) However, lower involvement of academic staff was found in the area of e-learning course development. They often prefer general tools for preparing and delivering teaching to specific educational applications. Czech academics prefer traditional digital tools such as email services and learning management systems (LMS), which are used by 85% of them, while Polish academics more often rely on more modern technologies such as mobile devices and specialised educational applications; (4) The use of massive open online courses (MOOCs) is very rare among academics. The results suggest that it is necessary to develop programs focused on educating and training academic staff in the application of ICT and e-learning in order to fully exploit the potential of these technologies in practice. This approach is the key to modernising higher education and enhancing its quality (Ogrodzka-Mazur et al., 2017; Ogrodzka-Mazur et al., 2018).

After the outbreak of the pandemic, Ramlo (2021) addressed the question of teaching concepts, examining the attitudes of academic staff toward the transition to online teaching. Her analysis identified three main groups: (1) technology enthusiasts who are optimistic about the possibilities of online teaching and its use, (2) overworked teachers who find it difficult to balance their work responsibilities with family and personal commitments, and (3) educators who perceive online teaching as limited, especially with regard to the interpersonal and practical aspects of teaching. The research suggests that teachers' specific approaches to teaching are related to their subjective willingness and readiness to use technology in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers are gradually developing a deeper understanding of the possible positive and negative impacts of technological tools and their potential role in the educational process. Therefore, diversity in approaches to teaching is likely to influence the actual use of technology, as different teachers integrate technology into their teaching differently based on their subjective beliefs and overall concept of teaching.

Further interesting information on teachers' attitudes toward DT can be found in the latest research survey, in which 2,165 teachers from across the Czech Republic participated. The survey shows that the majority of teachers (58.48%) have a neutral attitude towards DT; they understand its usefulness, but do not overestimate its impact. More than a third of teachers (37.32%) have a positive attitude towards DT, and only a very small proportion of teachers (2.77%) have a negative attitude towards DT. More than half of Czech teachers consider themselves regular users of DT (66.24%), a quarter consider themselves advanced users (26.19%), and some even consider themselves experts (3.83%). Only 3.51% consider themselves beginners in the use of DT (Kopecký & Szotkowski, 2020).

1.2 Self-directed learning and university teachers

According to Průcha and Veteška (2014), self-directed learning (SDL) is a learning process in which individuals plan their own pace and monitor the progress and results of their learning. SDL is used primarily in adult education, distance learning, and programmed learning, where special teaching aids are used, such as educational programmes, computers, and professional support from tutors and consultants. Successful SDL requires a high degree of motivation and study discipline. The individual not only controls his learning process but also actively engages in motivational, activity-based, and metacognitive aspects. Although it is frequently used in people's practical lives, it is a type of learning that has been little researched.

Based on an analysis of the DigCompEdu framework, which describes 22 digital competencies of a university teacher, we can conclude that the development of digital competencies is a key component for professional development within SDL in a changing academic environment. It enables teachers not only to adapt to technological trends, but also to actively seek new teaching strategies, reflect on their own activities, and develop their own pedagogical repertoire (Redecker, 2017; Neumajer, 2018; Černý, 2023).

2 METHODOLOGY

The above findings show how diverse university teachers' attitudes towards the use of DT in teaching are. However, we can assume that it is precisely these attitudes that become a key factor in determining the extent to which they influence SDL ability.

This study aims to determine how university teachers' attitudes toward the use of DT in teaching influence their readiness for SDL.

The research sample consists of 375 respondents, university teachers from all fields according to the field of research and development classification. Of the total number of 375

respondents, 206 were women (55%) and 169 were men (45%). 107 respondents had up to 5 years of experience; 135 respondents had 5–14 years of experience; 85 respondents had 15–24 years of experience; and 48 respondents had more than 25 years of experience.

Data on SDL readiness were obtained from respondents using Fisher's standardised diagnostic tool, the Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS). The questionnaire contains 40 items divided into three key domains: (1) Self-Management Domain; (2) Desire for Learning Domain; and (3) Self-Control Domain. The individual domains contain 13, 12, and 15 items, and respondents were able to select answers on a five-point scale: 1 – strongly disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 – neutral position; 4 – agree; and 5 – strongly agree (AlRadini et al., 2022; Fisher et al., 2001).

Data on respondents' attitudes toward DT in education were collected using three items of our own design, with the same response options. Individual items are marked with codes: (DG₁) I view the use of digital technologies in teaching positively; (DG₂) Digital technologies help me manage my self-education more effectively; (DG₃) I regularly use online courses or e-learning platforms for my professional development.

Parametric tests, Student's t test of two independent samples and ANOVA, were used to analyse the significance of differences between the scales of individual respondent segments. The following research hypotheses were established: H₀ applies when the differences found are not statistically significant at the 5% significance level. H_A applies when the differences found are statistically significant at the 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$).

3 RESULTS

The results of the ANOVA test ($F = 4.753$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.009$) for the research hypothesis no. 1 confirmed the validity of H_A, that is, that the differences in the mean value of the total SDLRS scale between the groups of respondents according to the (DG₁) evaluation of the use of DT in teaching are statistically significant at the level of significance of 5%, as can be seen in Table 1. The post hoc Tukey HSD test then confirmed statistically significant differences in the SDLRS total scale values between the respondents who perceive the use of DT in positively teaching and others, that is, both respondents with an ambivalent attitude ($p = 0.068$) and those with a disapproving attitude ($p = 0.060$).). However, these differences are significant at the 10% significance level.

Table 1*SDLRS total according to agreement with statement (DG1): "I view the use of digital technologies in teaching positively."*

	Mean	Median	N	Std. Deviation
Disagree	149.00	150.00	15	16.869
Neutral position	152.69	154.00	39	17.104
Agree	158.88	158.00	321	16.291

Source: own processing

Note ($F = 4.753$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.009$); Mean = mean value of the total SDLRS score (40 – 200).

In this case, too, ANOVA ($F = 12.642$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.000$) confirmed statistically significant differences between the respondents' groups in terms of DT assistance (DG₂) to manage self-education. The post hoc Tukey HSD test performed on research hypothesis No. 2 confirmed the validity of H_A, as it found statistically significant differences in the total scale values of the SDLRS between respondents who find DT helpful in managing their self-education more effectively and others, that is, both respondents with an ambivalent attitude ($p = 0.000$) and those with a disapproving attitude ($p = 0.029$), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2*SDLRS total according to agreement with the statement (DG2): "Digital technologies help me manage my self-education more effectively."*

	Mean	Median	N	Std. Deviation
Disagree	149.00	150.00	15	16.869
Neutral position	152.69	154.00	39	17.104
Agree	158.88	158.00	321	16.291

Source: own processing

Note ($F = 12.642$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.000$); Mean = mean value of the total SDLRS score (40 – 200).

Table 3 shows that the ANOVA performed ($F = 16.756$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.000$) for the hypothesis of the study no. 3 confirmed the validity of H_A, as it also found statistically significant differences between the groups of respondents in terms of (DG₃) the use of online courses or e-learning platforms for professional growth, while the post hoc Tukey HSD test pointed to statistically significant differences in the SDLRS total scale values between respondents who do not regularly use online courses or platforms and others, i.e., both respondents with an ambivalent attitude ($p = 0.005$) and those with an affirmative attitude ($p = 0.000$).

Table 3

SDLRS total according to agreement with the statement (DG3) "I regularly use online courses or e-learning platforms for my professional development."

	Mean	Median	N	Std. Deviation
Disagree	150,69	150,00	104	15,122
Neutral position	157,78	159,00	93	15,110
Agree	162,06	160,50	178	16,732

Source: own processing

Note (F = 16.756, df = 2, p = 0.000); Mean = mean value of the total SDLRS score (40 – 200).

4 CONCLUSION

Data analysis yielded results based on which we can conclude that: (1) university teachers who have a positive attitude toward the use of DT in education achieve better results in SDL compared to teachers who are sceptical or neutral about DT. This suggests that a positive attitude toward the integration of DT into teaching has a direct impact on the development of the ability to independently manage one's own education and professional growth; (2) university teachers who perceive DT as an effective tool for the efficient management of their self-education demonstrate a significantly higher level of SDL ability than those who are cautious or reject this role of DT; (3) regular use of online courses or e-learning platforms is associated with significantly better SDL outcomes compared to teachers who do not use these forms of education or use them only occasionally. Active participation in online education thus supports teachers' ability to systematically and effectively manage their professional growth.

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MAPPING FURTHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Simona Dulovics Sámelová

Abstract: *The article addresses the role and continuing education of teaching assistants (TAs) in Slovakia within the context of the current inclusive direction of the education system. Inclusive education emphasizes the need to create conditions for all pupils without distinction, and the role of a qualified TA is crucial in this process for supporting pupils and fostering an accepting environment. To ascertain the opinions of TAs regarding their job responsibilities and opportunities for further education, a survey was conducted on a sample of 145 respondents. The results showed that the level of continuing education offered is rated as average by respondents (average 3), yet they perceive the opportunities provided by employers as high (average 1.87). The most relevant courses identified were those focused on pupils' specific needs (82%), emotional support (80%), and communication with pupils (75%). For supporting further education, financial support, flexible working conditions, and information campaigns are key. The professional preparedness and continuous education of TAs are essential for effective work with a diverse pupil population and for implementing the principles of inclusive education. Investing in the continuing education of TAs is crucial for a successful and sustainable inclusive education system in Slovakia.*

Ke words: *Teaching assistant, pupil, inclusion, school.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The current inclusive direction of education in Slovakia places increased emphasis on the use of teaching assistants and especially on their education and further education, which is the area that forms the main focus of the contribution. Inclusion calls for ensuring quality education for all pupils without distinction, because every pupil, regardless of psychological or physical prerequisites and limitations, is a benefit to the school and society. It is precisely a quality teaching assistant who becomes an element that leads pupils and society to understanding and supporting each other, which emphasizes the uniqueness of each of us and the direction towards positive development. Bagaľová et al. (2015, p. 5) state that: „Inclusive education means creating such educational conditions in schools for all pupils without distinction that will help

them overcome barriers in learning and support the development of their individual potential. In agreement with Belková (2010), we mention that it is necessary to emphasize building a world in school that is free from any discrimination, teaches pupils not to have prejudices, to respect and accept each other regardless of race, gender, family circumstances, religion, disability or orientation.

Horáčková (2015) points out that a teaching assistant does not have a precisely defined work procedure because it depends on the specific needs of a particular pupil with special education need (SEN) and his/her specific disadvantage.

It is important that he/she also pays attention to intact pupils in the classroom. During classes, therefore, a teaching assistant observes pupils with SEN and intact pupils, analyzes their behavior and learning, progress or reserves in the curriculum, helps them with repeating the curriculum or clarifying difficult- to- understand curriculum or assignments. If the assistant works with the whole class and helps everyone, whether pupils with SEN or intact pupils, he contributes to the formation of a positive classroom climate, to understanding, to building higher self-confidence of the pupil.

In addition to academic support, the teaching assistant also plays an important role in the social and emotional inclusion of pupils. He helps them cope with stressful situations, build self-confidence and develop communication skills. The assistant's individual approach is key, especially for pupils with SEN, who require specific teaching methods and support in managing everyday school duties.

In the Slovak context, professional standards are decisive for teaching assistants, which were innovated in 2023 and are the output of the national project NP TEACHERS (NIVaM, 2023). They consist of a set of professional competencies that create the competence profile of a pedagogical employee. They are arranged in three areas (Child/pupil, Educational process, Teaching assistant) and describe the professional activity of a teaching assistant. A competency model was also developed by Korpan, Sheffield & Verwoord (2015), where each professional competence is filled with the required knowledge and skills.

In agreement with the opinion of Šuhajdová (2023), we state that Decree No. 173/2023 Coll. on the qualification requirements of pedagogical employees and professional employees „includes among the key: qualification requirements, integrity, health fitness and command of the state language“. It does not mention more specific personality requirements that can be considered significant in the performance of the profession of teaching assistant, not only in

terms of his approach to fulfilling his work duties, but above all in terms of his approach to pupils, especially pupils with special educational needs.

Although there are clear definitions of the competencies of teaching assistants, the reality of their training and further education in Slovakia faces many challenges. The effectiveness of the work of a teaching assistant directly depends on the level of his training and access to further education. It is important that he has access to professional training, methodological materials and supervision, which will allow him to better manage difficult situations in the classroom and provide quality support to both pupils and teachers. Despite the increase in the number of teaching assistants in recent years, their number is still not sufficient to cover the needs of schools

In addition, there is a lack of systematic training and methodological support for assistants, which affects the quality of their work.

The key step is to create a systemic approach to the further education of teaching assistants, introduce standardized methodological materials and strengthen their competencies in the field of inclusive education. Only in this way can their presence in classrooms be fully effective and beneficial not only for pupils, but also for teachers and the overall functioning of the school environment.

It can be stated, based on the need for lifelong learning and a constantly developing society, that the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities represent a framework that can be considered as a starting point for further education. Continuous development, a changing society, the need for inclusion and the increase in pupils with SEN require continuous education, self-education. The most common barriers to continuing education for teaching assistants include:

- Lack of time: High workload and family responsibilities can limit assistants' ability to pursue continuing education.
- Financial constraints: Some courses and seminars may require fees.
- Lack of information: Not all assistants have sufficient information about available continuing education opportunities.

2 METHODOLOGY

The theoretical part of the paper emphasized the key role of teaching assistants and at the same time outlined the challenges in the field of their education and the changing requirements for their work. In order to obtain empirical data on the current problems that teaching assistants encounter in practice in connection with their further education opportunities and the fulfillment of their competencies, we conducted the following survey.

The aim was to find out the opinions of teaching assistants on the possibilities of their further education and obstacles in their work.

We used a questionnaire of our own design, containing statements for which the respondents expressed their level of agreement on a scale and also open-ended items aimed at expressing an opinion. We distributed it electronically through the nationwide Facebook group “Asistenti učitel'ov” due to its wide reach and the efficiency of data collection.

The survey sample consisted of 145 respondents, 142 (97.9%) female teaching assistants and 3 (2.1%) male teaching assistants. In terms of age range, the youngest of the respondents was 19 years old, the oldest was 60 years old. There were 10 (6.9%) respondents in the age range of 18-25 years, 37 (25.5%) respondents in the age range of 26-35 years, 40 (27.6%) respondents in the age range of 36-45 years and 35 (24.1%) respondents in the age range of 45-55 years. 23 (15.9%) respondents were 56 years and older. The length of assistantship practice ranged from up to one year (28 respondents, 19.3%), 32 (22%) assistants have been working as teaching assistants for 1 year, 31 (21.4%) assistants have been working for 1 to 3 years, 45 (31.1%) assistants have been working for 3 to 8 years and 9 (6.2%) assistants have been working for over 8 years.

The survey sample consisted of 144 (99.3%) respondents working as a teacher's assistant, 1 (0.7%) respondent works as an assistant of free time educator.

We were also interested in the education achieved. 35 (24.3%) respondents have a secondary education with a high school diploma with a non-pedagogical focus, 27 (18.8%) respondents had additional pedagogical education after a university non-pedagogical study, 25 (17.4%) respondents had a 1st degree university education with a pedagogical focus, 23 (16%) respondents stated that they have a secondary education with a high school diploma with a pedagogical focus. 16 (11.1%) respondents stated that they have a secondary education with a high school diploma with a non-pedagogical focus. 14 (9.7%) respondents had a 2nd level

university education with a non-pedagogical focus and 4 (2.7) respondents reported that they had a 1st level university education with a non-pedagogical focus.

3 RESULTS

In the beginning, we identified the most common problems and barriers in the work of teaching assistants. These were statements whose value the respondents had to mark on a scale (1 – very often 2 – often 3 – I cannot assess 4 – rarely 5 – never), while we present the average values of the respondents' answers.

They consider the greatest obstacle to be the lack of interest in cooperation on the part of parents, which occurs very often (1.55). The lack of opportunities for further education was cited as a frequent barrier in their activities, which shows that the respondents are interested in improving their competences and skills, but it is necessary to create opportunities for their further development. They often (2.3) also perform activities beyond the scope, we identified specific activities in another, open-ended question. Respondents often (2.53) perceive an unequal position within the teaching staff. They could not assess (2.88) whether they considered the support of the management to be frequent, they were more inclined to the value of „I don't know“. They perceive the insufficient resistance of the school support team closer to the value of „I can't assess“ (3.23).

The key part of the questionnaire was the questions regarding the possibilities of further education of teaching assistants. These were scaled items, and we present the average value that the respondents marked on the scale (1 - very high 2 - high 3 - average 4 - partially available 5 - unavailable/low). They assess the level of further education as average (3) and they perceive the possibilities of further education from the employer as high (1.87). They carry out further education very often during working hours (2) and averagely outside working hours (3.2). We found out whether they had completed training, education or a course. 140 (96.5%) respondents had completed training, education or a course, with 133 (92%) of them having completed training in the field of inclusion, which is understandable given the efforts towards inclusion in schools in the Slovak Republic. Since respondents could select more than one answer, 87 (60%) of them also selected the answer that they had completed training on learning disabilities, 51 (35%) of them had also completed training focused on communication with pupils and psychological issues, and 47 (32%) of them had completed training focused specifically on physical or mental disabilities of pupils with SEN and procedures for working with them. More than half (80, 55.2%) of respondents stated that training is carried out directly at their

workplace, and almost half (60, 41.4%) stated that they have the opportunity and access to all courses and training, online or in person, regardless of where they take place. 15 (10.4) respondents stated that their school does not provide teaching assistants with further education opportunities.

We investigated what types of educational courses or training would teaching assistants consider to be the most relevant for professional development. Respondents would most likely accept courses focused on the specific needs of the children and pupils they work with. This answer was given by 119 (82%). In addition, 116 (80%) of those surveyed would also accept courses focused on supporting and advising the emotional side of pupils, as well as courses focused on developing communication with pupils (110, 75%) and training on inclusive education (110, 75%), training on legislation and the rights of teaching assistants would be used by 76 (50.4%) respondents.

4 DISCUSSION

The modern inclusive approach increasingly emphasizes the teaching assistant as a facilitator of learning for all pupils in the classroom. His role is expanding from individual support for pupils with SEN to active participation in creating an accessible and supportive environment for the entire class. This includes helping to differentiate teaching, adapting materials for different needs of pupils, supporting cooperation between pupils and generally contributing to a positive climate and an individualized approach to each pupil, regardless of their specific needs.

In this context, the perception of the assistant's contribution is shifting from exclusive support of the individual to inclusive support of the entire team, where the assistant helps create conditions for the success of each pupil and supports the teacher in fulfilling the principles of inclusive education. This shift in understanding the role of the teaching assistant may have also significantly influenced the responses of respondents in our survey, who perceived their main role primarily in helping the pupil in the teaching process, which may include a wider range of activities aimed at supporting the learning of all pupils.

In order to effectively manage this complex and constantly evolving task, and especially for working with an increasingly diverse population of pupils with diverse needs, the professional preparation of teaching assistants is key. It is essential that they have not only sufficient initial knowledge and skills, but also continuous access to relevant and high-quality further education.

Only in this way will they be able to adequately respond to the specific needs of each pupil, effectively implement the principles of inclusive education and contribute to improving the quality of pupils' education. Investment in their further education is therefore not only support for the assistants themselves, but above all a necessary condition for successful and sustainable inclusive education.

Based on the results, we conclude that cooperation with the School Support Team, which respondents rated as I cannot assess (3.23), is a necessary prerequisite for the effective functioning of a teaching assistant. From the aspect of the assistants' education alone, where not everyone has pedagogical and special pedagogical education and must start it within 2 years and finish it within 4, it is necessary to provide the teaching assistant with facilitation and assistance in working with a pupil with SEN. Education of a student with SEN outside the main class is rare (3.62), since segregation is excluded with the inclusive orientation of the school.

From the respondents' point of view, the level of education offered is average, but respondents try to use these opportunities as much as possible. Training is often (1.8 often) carried out during working hours, under any conditions. Preference for training during weekends had an average value of 3.2, which was marked on the scale as an option "both during working hours and outside of working hours", i.e. especially during weekends. Based on the above, it can be stated that it is necessary to look for ways to support the further education of assistants, the following is needed:

- Financial support - schools and founders should provide financial support for the further education of assistants.
- Flexible working conditions - enabling participation in educational activities during working hours or providing compensation for lost working hours.
- Information campaigns - disseminating information about available further education opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The activities of a teaching assistant include a wide range of activities, such as assistance in overcoming various barriers in education, support in the use of special teaching and compensatory aids, assistance in understanding instructions and tasks, as well as support in integrating into peer groups (Križo, 2021). Within inclusive education, a teaching assistant

often works not only with a specific pupil, but also with the entire class, thereby contributing to the creation of a supportive and accepting environment. An important aspect of his work is also cooperation with the teacher in planning and implementing teaching, adapting teaching materials and assessing pupil progress.

The modern inclusive approach increasingly emphasizes the teaching assistant as a facilitator of learning for all pupils in the classroom. His role is expanding from individual support for students with SEN to active participation in creating an accessible and supportive environment for the entire class. This includes helping to differentiate teaching, adapting materials for different needs of pupils, supporting cooperation between pupils and generally contributing to a positive climate and an individualized approach to each pupil, regardless of their specific needs.

The professional preparation of teaching assistants is essential for high-quality work with pupil with special educational needs. It is important that assistants have sufficient knowledge, skills and support to carry out their work effectively. Continuous learning and development are key to improving the quality of education for all pupils.

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ON SELECTED ASPECTS OF ADULT SELF-LEARNING

Dominika Temiaková

Abstract: *The importance of informal learning has long been recognized in education. Human education cannot be curtailed only to obtain or increase qualifications with the aim of employability. Many competencies or characteristics whose importance we appreciate in the 21st century, such as critical thinking, self-confidence, self-esteem, or a change of perspective, can be developed through self-directed learning opportunities or activities outside formal or informal frameworks. Such learning, often referred to as informal learning, can have an individual or group character. This process is highly unintentional, often unconscious. It occurs without externally determined criteria (in the form of goals or content), without the involvement of an institutionally appointed professional (such as an educator, lecturer, or instructor). Such learning is relatively difficult to grasp, describe, and thus explore, but at the same time, we consider it to be the most effective, because among the three types of learning activities, informal learning is most based on the interests and needs of learners.*

Keywords: *self-learning, self-directed learning, education, adults.*

INTRODUCTION

Self-management in adult learning can also be found in terminology referred to as self-learning, self-planned learning, independent adult learning, self-directed learning, and self-initiated learning. Self-directed learning has been elaborated by several authors (e.g., Lucy M. Guglielmino, Stephen D. Brookfield, Ralph G. Brockett, Roger Hiemstra, Philip C. Candy) (R. T. Owen, 2002). However, the complex synthesis of adult education and the characteristics of the principles of adult education are attributed to the American andragogist Malcolm S. Knowles (1968, 1970, 1980), who conceived andragogy as an art and science of adult learning (as opposed to pedagogy). This allows adult learners to take dual responsibility for their education and learning. The art of andragogy includes self-management as one of its key components, since "Adults manage themselves when they learn something from themselves" (Knowles, 1989, p. 91, in R. T. Owen, 2002). Knowles (1975, p. 18, in R. T. Owen, 2002) defined a self-directed learning process as one in which "individuals take the initiative, without the assistance of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning objectives, identifying personnel and material resources for learning, selecting and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes."

1 ON THE CONCEPT OF SELF-LEARNING AND EDUCATION

Learning is an active process of constructing knowledge, which involves solving problems, selecting information, and creating knowledge networks. The learning subject (human) has an active role, so it is important to create conditions for self-directed learning. Learning is socially mediated. Švec (in M. Krystoň, 2018) distinguishes between "self-learning" and "you-learning", where self-learning is systematic learning in the role of a self-learner (in home or non-home conditions), and you-learning is learning in the social role of a pupil/student/participant/learner, i.e., learning by others. It is coherent, smoothly and permanently organized. Self-learning and tebalarning touch on intentional learning (with), but we also know unintentional (functional, accidental) learning. Learning is a basic category that includes intentional learning activities of both a formal and non-formal nature, as well as the unintentional (functional) acquisition of knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes, which is referred to as informal learning. Learning is a guided process that can be extrapersonal (directed by others) or intrapersonal (self-management), which is typical of self-education. In practice, these approaches are combined. Extra-person-directed learning is similar to formal learning, while intra-person-directed self-learning is similar to informal learning.

As M. Krystoň (2018, pp. 9-10) further states, "... Education includes learning. According to A. Rogers (2002), learning is even an 'essential ingredient' of education, but as the author states, 'although flour is the basis of bread, however, flour is not inherently bread.'" Similarly, learning is not inherently education. Learning opportunities, like accidental influences, are ubiquitous, but learning only occurs at specific times and conditions. There are times when we don't engage in education, even though we are learning, but transforming learning into learning requires something more."

It is true that the difference between education and learning is diverse and includes various aspects, including biological, psychological, and pedagogical aspects. Learning is primarily an individual process in which the brain responds to stimuli from the environment and creates new neural connections that facilitate the processing and storage of information. Education, on the other hand, is a structured process aimed at directing and inspiring the development of these neural connections through the control of input stimuli to the brain (Hideaki, 2003). This distinction is further developed through the prism of individual differences and educational psychology, which highlight the unique ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of individuals in a learning environment. (Bebasari & Suhaili, 2022)

Table 1. Selected perspectives of insight into the concept of learning and education

Perspective	Learning	Education
Biological and Neurological	Adaptation of the brain to stimuli, creating neural connections that function as information processing circuits (Hideaki, 2003)	It prepares and manages these stimuli to guide brain development, essentially shaping the information processing architecture (Hideaki, 2003)
Psychological and individual	Educational psychology emphasizes the importance of understanding individual differences in learning and learning, such as biological, cognitive, and psychological differences (Bebasari & Suhaili, 2022). Teachers (educators) should use a variety of ways to take these differences into account in order to improve, enrich, and individualize learning (Bebasari & Suhaili, 2022). The importance of an inclusive learning environment is emphasized, recognizing and adapting to learners' individual needs and learning styles.	
Pedagogical and theoretical	More passive acquisition of knowledge. (Toye, 1971)	A broader concept encompassing the learner's active approach to his or her development (Toye, 1971). It focuses on the didactic interpretation of the goals of education. (Prange, 2006)
Praxeological and organizational	It is associated with the acquisition of specific skills for job positions. (Masadeh, 2012)	It is associated with a formal academic background. (Masadeh, 2012)
	Both are equally necessary to fully exploit the potential of employees in complex organizational environments. (Masadeh, 2012)	

Source: own processing

Although education and learning are different, they are interconnected processes that complement each other. Education provides the framework and guidance needed to learn effectively, while learning (yourself) is the mechanism through which individuals acquire and apply knowledge.

This process, the process of self-learning, acquires greater importance in adulthood. As Maňák (2024, pp. 197-198) states, one of the goals of the educational process is "the independence of the personality in learning, acting, decision-making, thinking, and in any activity. The formation of this character trait of personality takes on various forms in individual areas of activity. In the conditions of teaching, it is about gradually developing pupils' independence in acquiring and using knowledge and skills. The essential features of pupils' independent work include a certain degree of independence from other influences, the ability to solve new problems and situations, the ability to use the acquired knowledge in new conditions, the ability to introduce new elements into activities, overcome obstacles and problems, etc. Independent learning work of pupils can be defined as an activity in which pupils acquire knowledge and skills through their own efforts, especially mental efforts, relatively independently of other people's help and guidance." It is the support and formation of this character trait in initial

(initiating) education in pupils that contributes to the ability to learn in adulthood.

2 SELF-LEARNING VS. SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

In this context, it is important to briefly define the concepts of self-learning and self-directed learning. They are not synonyms because they differ in key aspects. These are two approaches to learning processes, with the difference mainly in the degree of control and active management of learning by the adult learner. Self-learning focuses on the process in which an individual learns independently, often without formal guidance from a teacher, lecturer, or institution. It is an independent acquisition of knowledge and skills, and the sources of such learning are broad-spectrum (books, the Internet, tutorials, practical experience). On the other hand, self-regulated or self-directed learning is a process that involves not only independent learning, but also active management and monitoring of one's learning. In this approach, the learner sets goals, plans their learning, tracks their progress, and reflects on how to improve their learning based on the feedback they receive. Thus, self-directed learning is a more systematic process that involves different stages of management. According to Kiwela & Ogbonna (2020, p. 51), "there is no age or time limit to self-learning, it can take place in youth and adulthood if the learner is aware of the process of self-learning."

Table 2. Differences in self-learning and self-directed learning

Criterion	Self-learning	Self-directed learning
Level of independence	An adult learns without a formal structure and external management.	An adult actively manages and monitors their learning, although they can use external resources and feedback.
Planning and goals	It can be unplanned or disorganized; The student learns at his own pace and interest.	An adult sets specific goals and actively plans how to achieve them.
Monitoring progress	There may be a lack of progress tracking or evaluation of results.	An adult regularly monitors their progress, evaluates their results, and adapts learning.
Reflexia a metakognícia	There may be a lack of activity related to the reflection and analysis of learning processes.	High level of metacognition – the adult reflects on his learning, which helps him improve.
Learning structure	Often, there is no structure or organized plan.	The learning process is structured, including planning, monitoring, and evaluation phases.
Example	If an adult chooses to learn a new language through an app or reading books, they can choose their own time and method of learning, without formal goals or evaluation.	If an adult sets a goal to learn a new language within six months, they create a learning plan, regularly assess their progress (e.g., through tests or self-assessment), and adapt their learning accordingly.

Source: own processing

In the literature, we also encounter the term autodidacticism. Autodidacticism, or autodidaxis, is a type of self-learning. It is a self-paced learning process in which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, or abilities without an official education system or educators. Autodidacticism is about complete independence and self-directed sourcing, while self-directed learning encompasses a broader framework that also includes content structuring and assessment to improve the learning process and tailor it to individual needs. An autodidactic approach is often associated with a deep interest or passionate intention to learn something at a high level without a formal education system or support. Autodidacticism often relies on a variety of available resources, such as books, online courses, videos, articles, or hands-on experience. Examples of autodidacticism include, for example, learning a foreign language through applications, reading foreign language books, or learning to play a musical instrument through tutorials, videos, and books. Thus, autodidacticism is very diverse and can be applied in many areas, from artistic disciplines (such as painting, music) to technical and professional skills (such as programming, foreign languages, entrepreneurship).

Autodidacticism can be characterized by:

- independence (the autodidact learns at his own pace and decides for himself what and how he will learn),
- autonomy (learning is guided by the learner's individual goals, motivation, and interests, which means that they are responsible for the entire learning process – from the choice of topics to the assessment of progress);
- flexibility (the possibility of a flexible approach to education, where the learner can choose the time, place, and form of learning),
- using different sources (searching for and using different sources of information – books, online materials, tutorials, discussions, practical exercises, experiences).

Autodidacticism has become especially popular in the age of the Internet, as there are numerous online resources available that allow learning different knowledge in diverse areas, without a formal education system.

Table 3. Advantages and disadvantages of autodidacticism

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility and control over the learning process(s): it takes place according to personal preferences, so the individual can choose and adapt the content and pace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of feedback: The autodidact may not receive feedback from professionals or educators, which can lead to incomplete or incorrect knowledge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrinsic motivation: this is often motivated by personal interests or career needs, which can 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less structured approach: more demanding setting of learning objectives, plans and

lead to greater engagement as well as higher motivation.	procedures, evaluation of progress, lower efficiency, and organisation of learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide availability of resources: a variety of free, affordable, and easily accessible educational materials that can be chosen in terms of content and focus outside the areas of the traditional educational offer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High level of self-discipline and self-control.

Source: own processing

CONCLUSION

Self-management is defined differently by different authors, but it is a characteristic of adulthood. The following four aspects apply to self-directed learning, which it serves:

- adapting to culture and ensuring its transmission;
- understanding and developing expertise or specialization of knowledge;
- revitalising organisations and society as a whole;
- personal fulfillment.

In environments like total institutions or other isolated settings, informal learning carries a dual significance. It is recognized that individuals within these communities—such as prisoners, marginalized Roma groups, adults with limited skills, and other social categories like the elderly or disadvantaged—often lack the desire to engage in continuous learning. They may not understand the value of education and thus lack motivation to participate in either formal or informal educational activities. Nonetheless, informal learning persists. Imposing formal or non-formal education on them proves ineffective, as it can exacerbate their already negative views or attitudes towards education. The rigidity of education, which tends to replicate past negative learning experiences tied to one's identity, is particularly criticized. Conversely, informal and adaptable educational settings have the potential to transform these negative experiences. Ideally, adults should have access to environments where they can voluntarily engage in various learning forms, at their own pace, and at times and situations that suit them.

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LIFELONG LEARNING: INSPIRATION AND TRENDS FROM PUBLIC LIBRARY PRACTICE

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Abstract: *Public libraries are natural centres for lifelong learning. They offer a wide range of services that support the development of adult skills. We will focus on how Slovak and Czech libraries respond to the self-education needs of adults and how they collaborate with other institutions. We will present specific community projects that libraries implement to support adult self-education.*

Keywords: *lifelong learning, non-formal learning, public libraries, digital technologies, community education, self-education*

1 INTRODUCTION

Considering the challenges currently associated with the era of digital transformation, such as expanding algorithmic dominance, the commercialization of space, and information flow acceleration, libraries appear to constitute an important structural element of the public sector. Their position, paradoxically, highlights the need to build stable community centres, which are fundamental for cultivating concentration and sustainable values. Innovative and proactive library management has the potential to establish libraries as key institutions that shape an adaptive and dynamic social environment. The concept of libraries thus transcends their traditional role; it encompasses a complex network of relationships, integrating the community, librarians, broader society, and technological innovations. In this synergy, libraries are transformed into epicentres of dialogue between individual readers and literary works, people and technology, and, last but not least, between the transparency of the public sector and the building of social trust.

Digital technologies represent both a challenge and an opportunity for Slovak libraries. If libraries fail to understand them, they can become a threat, but if they perceive them as assistance, they will bring many positive changes, especially in terms of their social impact on education. In line with this shift, libraries have become important educational centres that support both formal and non-formal learning. The role of libraries is to actively respond to the changing demands of the times and find their place in a dynamic world by supporting lifelong learning. (Babjaková, 2025) Our main focus in this paper is to present inspirations and trends

in public library practice in the field of lifelong learning. We will examine how libraries function as centres for self-education, support the development of digital skills and implement innovative approaches. We will reflect on their potential in the context of current social and technological changes.

2 LIBRARIES AS CENTRES FOR SELF-EDUCATION

Libraries are transforming from book depositories into dynamic centres for lifelong learning and community life. Systematic education in the field of media and information literacy is often lacking in adult population, despite its significant impact on social cohesion and the functioning of society. It is therefore desirable, even essential, that libraries, as relevant cultural and educational institutions, focus primarily on this target group and provide it with adequate tools to help them effectively find their bearings in an environment of information overload. Libraries play an irreplaceable role in educating the public in critical thinking and information literacy. At present, with the information explosion associated with a massive increase in available information and the spread of misinformation on social networks and websites, libraries play a key role in providing verified and reliable information. By promoting critical thinking and thorough verification of sources, libraries help to reduce the spread of misinformation. What is required is to verify large amounts of available information and to be able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate information in any textual content. Libraries are therefore an important source of relevant information for the society in the 21st century. Linking librarianship with non-formal public learning opens up many opportunities to positively promote critical thinking while increasing users' interest in reading and listening comprehension.

2.1 Modern library services

Libraries expand their services using **digital technologies** to provide access to a wide range of digital resources, such as e-books, audiobooks, scientific articles and databases; for example, Oravská knižnica Antona Habovštiaka offers an e-book section titled “E-books KUBO CLUB”. (Oravská knižnica Antona Habovštiaka, 2025) Městská knihovna v Praze is currently the largest e-book publisher in the Czech Republic. (Řehák, 2025) Some libraries have broadened their offer to include podcasts. Krajská knižnica Karola Kmeťka v Nitre features a “Podcasts” section on its website, (Krajská knižnica v Nitre, 2025) Verejná knižnica Mikuláša Kováča (A powerful trio in the library – coffee, cake and book) and Krajská knižnica v Žiline (Library from behind

the desk), Verejná knižnica Michala Rešetku v Trenčíne (BIBLIO PODCAST), and Bánovecká knižnica (Bánovecká library) make the content of their podcasts available on Spotify. (Spotify, 2025)

In order to provide a comprehensive picture, **internal innovation processes in libraries and their professional environment** must also be taken into account. For example, in 2002, Verejná knižnica Mikuláša Kováča introduced and has since been successfully using the Google Workspace system, which required changing the librarians' mindset and eliminating their prejudice against new work practices, such as sharing information instead of sending it. Libraries hold online conferences and video conferences. For example, the two-day educational project organised since 2020 by Knižnica pre mládež mesta Košice, the Modern Librarian Academy, focuses on providing inspiration and tips for modern librarians on how to keep up with the times and develop their skills. All libraries in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, from the national to municipal ones, use modern library information systems.

Based on an analysis of innovative trends in library practice, as presented on the websites of selected Slovak and Czech libraries, it is clear that the **implementation of self-checkout systems represents a key step** in the modernization of library services. These systems, which are becoming an integral part of public library services, provide users with flexible access to resources outside the standard opening hours, thereby increasing their availability and attractiveness to the general public. When introduced, these systems support a more efficient use of human resources in libraries, namely by freeing librarians for other tasks. Librarians can then focus on the more complex aspects of their profession, such as individual assistance, organizing community and educational activities, digital skills development, as well as other tasks that require human contact and deeper expert knowledge. This shift in their approach to services has transformed libraries into dynamic centres of lifelong learning and community life.

At present, libraries are not perceived as pioneering institutions in the implementation of innovative approaches and new technologies. However, the goal of modern libraries with an innovative focus is to expand the range of services and respond to the current needs of the society. In many Slovak and Czech libraries, as stated on their websites, the implementation of digital technologies such as 3D printers, virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and artificial intelligence (AI) is now a reality, allowing their users to work on their own projects and develop new skills. SmartLabs are equipped with technologies such as 3D printers, cutting plotters, sublimation printers, multifunction heat press machines and pyrography kits, which

open the door to creativity, design, and experimenting for all age groups. Within the framework of non-formal learning, libraries organize courses on Micro:bits and Ozobots.

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed the labour market paradigms significantly and it is expected that the impact of automation will primarily be felt in areas of routine intellectual activities rather than manual activities. Městská knihovna v Praze serves as an excellent case in point, as it currently tests the use of its virtual library assistant Aia – a chatbot based on large language models, trained to answer standard questions from the readers. (Řehák, 2025)

Libraries are also exploring education through video games, which have the potential not only to educate (e.g., by presenting historical events), but also to develop motor and social skills, and even incentivise reading.

2.2 Individual assistance

Libraries and librarians play a key role in providing individual assistance. They help adults find relevant information and resources for their personal and professional development. In the context of the ongoing digital transformation and growing information chaos, the role of librarians is changing fundamentally. They have transformed into key facilitators of education, acting as mentors in the process of digital adaptation and, at the same time, as knowledgeable guides in the complex world of information. Libraries provide access to online databases, scientific articles and other electronic information resources. Such evolution of the profession highlights the fact that despite online databases and the use of self-checkout systems to optimize operating procedures, the human factor remains at the heart of providing meaningful library services and direct contact with users. As stated by Sládkayová (2022), “we can derive the basic competencies that individual employees must meet, such as communication skills (establishing contact, providing information and advice), diagnostic skills, and professional competencies related to specific leisure activities”. Librarians’ activities thus serve as an undeniable proof that interaction with people is and always will be the key pillar supporting the library as a community and educational centre.

2.3 Organizing community and educational activities

Libraries organize a variety of programmes and activities to promote self-education, such as reading clubs, language courses, computer courses, lectures, and discussions. These community activities promote social interaction and cohesion. As an example of linking theory and practice,

we present SmartLabs, modern spaces in 50 public libraries in Slovakia, which are designed for experiential STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) learning, to enhance creativity, technological and craft skills, and to popularize science. Each SmartLab is unique and tailored to the needs of its local users, with options ranging from 3D printing to robot programming as play. (Baranko, 2025) Under the CVTI Smart Library project, Hornozemplínska knižnica vo Vranove nad Topľou provides courses on Micro:bits and Ozobots and the use of a 3D pen, 3D scanner or a laser engraver. (Hornozemplínska knižnica vo Vranove nad Topľou, 2025) Krajská knižnica Karola Kmeťka v Nitre operates a “SmartLab 3D Public Printer”. (Krajská knižnica v Nitre, 2025) Knižnica pre deti a mládež mesta Košice offers “SmartLab – LitPark and Humbuk Intelligent Laboratories” aimed at the general public. (Knižnica pre deti a mládež mesta Košice, 2025) Specific examples of gamification and the use of play elements can be found on the website of Knihovna Jiřího Mahena v Brně (2025). Its “Summer with book packs” aims to enhance the motivation and engagement of adults in the process of self-education. The use of gamification in this context serves to diversify education and make it more attractive. Městská knihovna Břeclav (2025) uses gamification primarily in the form of escape games. Escape games are an excellent example of experiential learning and the development of critical thinking and teamwork in an informal environment. These examples show how libraries integrate different content and forms into their services to increase the appeal and outreach of their educational and community activities for adults.

2.4 Digital skills development

Given the rapid development of technology, it is essential for adults to have adequate digital skills. Libraries are becoming key institutions in this regard. Libraries function as digital learning centres, offering programmes and services to promote digital literacy and skills. They organize workshops and training sessions focused on improving digital skills, such as computer basics, internet safety, and the use of software applications. For example, Verejná knižnica Michala Rešetku (2025) v Trenčíne offers a computer skills course titled “E-mail it to me, granny”. Such programmes are especially valuable for the elderly whose digital skills are inferior to those of the younger generations, thus helping to reduce the digital divide and ensuring equal opportunities for all members of the community.

Libraries support online adult learning by providing access to online courses and databases, as well as through individual advice concerning the choice and use of online learning platforms. E-learning plays a key role in adult education, especially in the context of lifelong learning and the increased use of information and communication technologies. There is a global trend for

libraries to provide wireless network (Wi-Fi) access throughout their premises, thereby supporting lifelong learning and access to up-to-date knowledge regardless of geographical location.

3 SUPPORTING LIFELONG LEARNING

Adult participation in lifelong learning is essential in modern knowledge societies. Libraries play a crucial role in this process, motivating and supporting adults in their lifelong learning efforts by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for learning. They provide a place where people can pause and understand complex information in a broader context, which is particularly important in the digital age with its enormous increase in available information. Libraries serve as important centres for adults to develop their competencies, and for marginalized groups in particular, supporting their integration into society. Libraries implement specific community projects to promote adult self-education. In addition, public libraries play a key role in promoting social inclusion and community life by providing safe and accessible spaces for all members of the community. For example, Verejná knižnica Mikuláša Kováča (2025) launched a pilot community education project for the elderly focused on safety and health, and also implemented projects with the SPP Foundation and the Orange Foundation to purchase voice readers, transistors and digital magnifiers for its visually impaired and blind readers. Knihovna Jiřího Mahena v Brně (2025) offers a year-round course called “Mahen’s Academy for the 21st Century”.

4 ETHICAL ASPECTS AND CRITICAL THINKING

In our present times, characterized by the accelerated advent of artificial intelligence and an exponential spread of fake news, libraries are taking on a crucial role in the process of verifying information, thereby establishing themselves as reliable and trustworthy sources. The primary mission of libraries is to guarantee the authenticity of information sources, and their contribution to reducing the spread of misinformation is undeniable. This benefit is achieved through their active support for critical thinking and thorough verification of sources, which corresponds with the views of experts such as Čuchor (2023). Although there are many specialized organizations dedicated to fact-checking, the degree of trust that these individual institutions enjoy from the public is key.

We believe that the **role of libraries is not to directly influence readers’ opinions, but to facilitate conditions that enable them to form their own opinions autonomously based on relevant, verified, and transparently available information.** This approach is essential in

strengthening the society's resilience to disinformation. As an example, we would like to point to the initiative of Městská knihovna v Praze, which has been providing robust and long-term systematic education for its users in the field of information and media literacy, for example through the award-winning De Facto educational programme.

5 CONCLUSION

Digital technologies clearly present both an opportunity and a challenge for Slovak libraries, which can bring many positive changes in terms of their social impact on education. The future of libraries lies in their ability to innovate and adapt to the changing needs of their users.

Libraries should continue to support formal and non-formal lifelong learning and focus on increasing reading and information literacy among their users. They are pillars of an educated and cultural society, supporting formal and non-formal learning, preserving and developing cultural values, and strengthening community cohesion and plurality of opinion. Their goal is to motivate as many people as possible to become members and actively use library services, offering them relevant and attractive opportunities for personal development and meaningful leisure activities. The concept of this development is defined as a compass to help employees make decisions in their daily practice.

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