

PREPARATION FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS AT UNIVERSITIES IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: The paper deals with the preparation of university students in the conditions of the Slovak Republic. The authors analyse the extent of implementation of the inclusive strategy in the undergraduate teacher training in Slovak Universities and specify objective indicators in the framework of this training. In particular, they focus on the readiness of future teachers to work with pupils with special educational needs.

Keywords: Special Educational Needs, Inclusive Approach, Inclusive Education

1 Introduction

Integrated/inclusive education has been part of education in Slovak schools for more than thirty years. In this context, Slovak colleges and universities that prepare future teachers have had to adapt their pre-graduate preparation so that future graduates are prepared to meet the special educational needs of pupils in regular schools (Belková, 2019; Belková, Zólyomiová, 2019). These requirements were also based on considering the above-mentioned policies, in which incentives for greater efficiency in education must also be applied, taking into account the needs of all learners.

The readiness of the environment from the point of view of the pupil, the classroom, the teacher and the school as an educational institution is more than important (Rakap et al. 2017; Benčíč et al., 2023; Kováčová, 2023). Also, for this reason, it is necessary to prepare in parallel schools as educational institutions (from primary school to college) and colleges as those who are jointly involved for the readiness of the educator, the college graduate (Kováčová, 2022). In this article, we present objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation in the field of inclusive education in Slovak colleges and universities (Kraska, Boyle, 2014; Belková, 2019; Belková et al., 2020; Belková et al., 2021).

2 Research design

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicators are the leading source on the state of education worldwide. They provide data on the structure, finances and performance of education systems in OECD countries and a number of acceding and partner countries (Sharma et al., 2015). Key information on the outputs of educational institutions; the impact of education in each country; access, participation and progression in education; the financial resources invested in education; and teachers, the learning environment and the organization of schools. Increasingly, governments around the world are taking international comparisons of educational opportunities and outcomes into account as they develop policies to improve the social and economic perspectives of individuals, as they apply incentives for greater efficiency in education, and as they help mobilize resources to meet increasing demands.

To find out the objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation we used the method of content analysis, we analysed the content of the information sheets of the subjects of pedagogical-psychological, social-scientific basis from both the first and second level of university teacher studies (Belková, Zólyomiová, 2019; Osvaldová, Vrabcová, 2020). Based on the analysis of the theoretical background regarding the issue of objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation, our research aim was to map the current state, the scope of the

inclusive strategy in the pre-graduate teacher preparation (Sharma et al., 2015; Jablonský et al., 2019a, Jablonský et al., 2019b). The aim of the research was to find out the explicit scope of inclusive strategies in the pre-graduate teacher preparation in Slovak universities. That is, to find out whether within the subjects of pedagogical-psychological and social-scientific basis (the so-called common basis) there are teaching subjects that focus their content on the preparation of teacher students to work with pupils with special educational needs (Belková, Vrabcová, 2021).

The following **research questions** emerged from the research objective to map objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation in inclusive education (Table 1).

Table 1: Research Question

Research question	Specification of the wording of the question
1	At what level of university studies is attention paid to the subject of education?
2	What subjects in terms of obligatory choice (obligatory, obligatory elective and elective) are prevalent in the subject education issue?
3	What is the preferred form of teaching (lecture, seminar/practice) of the subjects devoted to the subject matter and what is their time allocation?
4	What is the content saturation of the individual courses on the given educational issue?

The basic research set designed for mapping objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation in the field of inclusive education consisted of 366 information sheets of subjects from the pedagogical-psychological and social-scientific basis, which is made up of obligatory, obligatory elective and elective subjects. The subject information sheets were obtained from all universities operating in Slovakia and involved in pre-graduate teacher preparation. The research set itself consisted of 38 information sheets, which were related to subjects related to inclusive education and work with pupils with special educational needs. To gain access to the information sheets of all colleges and universities providing teacher education, we used the academic information systems AIS, MAIS - in particular their public access; colleagues of individual colleges who provided us with access to this system.

3 Findings: objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation for working with pupils with SEN

Objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation were measured by analysing the information sheets of the courses from the so-called common core of courses of teacher education programmes. We were interested in the current state of objective indicators of pre-graduate preparation for working with pupils with special educational needs at Slovak universities and their faculties that provide pre-graduate teacher preparation. The results of the findings are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Representation of subjects dedicated to the issue of working with pupils special educational needs of their classification in the degree of university study, the obligation of their selection, the form of teaching and time allocation

We consider the classification of these subjects in the common pedagogical-psychological and social-scientific basis to be important objective indicators of the pre-graduate preparation of teachers for work with pupils with special educational needs, not only in terms of the level of study at which they are offered, but especially in terms of the obligation to select them (i.e. whether they are compulsory subjects, obligatory electives or electives), the form of their teaching (lecture, seminar/practice), but also their time allocation within the framework of their offer. The

findings from the information sheets of subjects of nine Slovak universities are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary evaluation I.

	Level of study	Type of subject			Number of subjects TOTAL		Form of teaching		Hourly subsidy	
		C	CO	O	For each level of study	For both levels of study	Lecture	Seminar /exercise	For each level of study	For both levels of study
U1	I	1	0	0	1	3	1	0	1	3
	II	0	0	2	2		2	0	2	
U2	I	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	2
	II	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	
U3	I	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	3
	II	1	2	0	3		1	2	3	
U4	I	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	6
	II	2	2	0	4		4	2	6	
U5	I	0	2	2	4	9	1	3	4	9
	II	3	2	0	5		1	4	5	
U6	I	1	3	0	4	8	4	1	5	9
	II	0	4	0	4		0	4	4	
U7	I	1	0	0	1	4	1	1	2	5
	II	1	2	0	3		1	2	3	
U8	I	1	1	1	3	4	2	2	4	6
	II	0	1	0	1		0	2	2	
U9	I	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
	II	0	2	0	2		2	0	2	
Σ	I	5	6	3	14	38	10	8	18	45
	II	7	15	2	24		11	16	27	

Legend:

C - compulsory subject

CO - compulsory optional subject

V - optional subject

U - University

I - Bachelor's degree of higher education

II - Master's degree in higher education

By content analysis of 38 information sheets of subjects from the so-called common basis we found that the ratio of subjects dedicated to the issue of inclusive education and work with pupils with special educational needs in the first and second level of university studies is in favour of the second level of study.

The highest number of subjects for both study levels (9) is provided by U5, the lowest number of subjects for both study levels (1) is provided by U2. Two universities within the first level of universities (U4, U9) do not offer subjects in the Common Core curriculum that pay attention to inclusive education and work with pupils with special educational needs within their content. One university (U2) does not offer subjects with the subject matter in the Common Core curriculum in the second level of universities, and one university (U3) does not offer teacher education at all in the first level. We found that out of the 38 subjects dedicated to the issue of working with pupils with SEN and inclusive education, 12 subjects are obligatory, 21 are obligatory elective and 5 are elective. Based on the data provided in the ILP, we found that 24 subjects are organised in the form of seminars or practices. The remaining 21 subjects are organised in the form of lectures. The total number is higher than the actual number of teaching subjects and this is because some

of the teaching subjects have a combined form of teaching P/S (4 subjects) or P/C (1 subject) (Osvaldová, Vrabcová, 2020).

Table 3: Summary evaluation II.

University	level of study	type of subject with special educational needs	% representation of topics related to SEN	performance standard
U1	I	C1	100%	1,2,3
		C2	-	-
	II	C3	100%	1,3
U2	I	C1	8,33%	1
	II	0	0	0
U3	II	-	-	-
		C1	100%	1
		C2	8,33%	1
U4	II	C3	30%	1
		I	0	0
		C1	33,33%	1,2,3
		C2	12,5%	1,2,3
U4	II	C3	36,36%	1,2,3
		C4	18,18%	1,2,3

Legend:

C - compulsory subject

U - University

I - Bachelor's degree of higher education

II - Master's degree in higher education

Courses dedicated to the issue of working with pupils with special educational needs in information sheets of subjects according to their content saturation with the issue of working with pupils with special educational needs and their credit load at individual Slovak universities (continued)

Content/curriculum of individual subjects we have identified 18 out of the number of all teaching subjects dedicated to inclusive education and preparation of students for work with pupils with special educational needs, which devote their entire content and scope capacity to the subject. We accepted the remaining subjects (20) in the preparation for inclusive education and work with pupils with special educational needs, as part of their content is necessary for students of teacher education programmes to identify the norm, sub-norm and supra-norm of pupil development. In the information sheets of subjects in learning outcomes, we observed large differences in the quality of processing. In some information sheets of subjects we encountered only a very general indication of what is required of the student, and it was very difficult to identify in them, in relation to the taxonomy above, at what level the subject develops the knowledge, skills, competences of the students. The sixteen information sheets of subjects in the learning outcomes section were developed regarding three levels: 1. to know, 2. to understand, 3. to be able to. In the content focus section of the information sheets of subjects, we can state that the pre-graduate preparation is not focused on the students' performance as teachers in an inclusive school, but the core focus is on the integrated education of the pupils (Osvaldová, Vrabcová, 2020).

Representation of subjects concerning work with pupils with special educational needs in the information sheets of subjects in terms of their classification in the degree of university study, the obligation of their selection, the form of teaching and time allocation

By content analysis of thirty-eight information sheets of teaching subjects of the so-called common core we found that the ratio of subjects dealing with the issue of inclusive education and work with pupils with special educational needs in the first and second

level of university studies is in favour of the second level of study. Another of our findings was that two of the nine colleges in the first cycle of university do not include subjects in the Common Core curriculum that pay attention to inclusive education and working with pupils with special educational needs within the content. One university does not provide subjects in the common core curriculum with the subject matter in the second cycle of university studies, and one university of the universities surveyed does not provide teacher education at all in the first cycle of university studies.

The profile of individual study programmes is made up of obligatory, obligatory elective and elective subjects. We have found that out of 38 subjects focusing on the issue of working with pupils with special educational needs and inclusive education, 12 subjects are obligatory, 21 subjects are obligatory elective and 5 subjects are elective. The obligatory elective and elective subjects are of great importance as they are chosen by the student in relation to his/her own preferences - profiling, fulfilling the requirements of the accreditation dossier on the minimum number of obligatory elective and elective subjects and finally as a means of achieving the necessary number of credits in the individual stages of study. However, these subjects carry the risk that students may not include them in their enrolment list or, in the event of unsuccessful completion, may replace them with another subject. This may lead to a situation where subjects dealing with the subject matter are offered but may not be studied in a given academic year. Therefore, the high number of obligatory electives and elective subjects is rather negative in terms of general preparation for the teaching profession.

University education in Slovakia is delivered through a variety of methods. In teacher preparation, traditional methods include lectures, seminars, internships, but we also encounter practices, trainings, courses. Although these are methods that have a deep tradition in university education, changes and innovations have affected them as well. Based on the data given in the subject information sheets, we found that 24 subjects are also organized as seminars and practices, thus we assume that students are actively involved in the teaching process. The remaining 21 subjects are delivered through lectures. The total number of course hours is higher than the number of teaching subjects themselves and this is because some teaching subjects have a combined teaching method of P/S (5 subjects) or P/C (1 subject). The most preferred teaching method is lecture. This finding need not only be viewed negatively. When creating accreditation files, the Ministry of Education and Science issued recommendations on the creation of the files themselves, which recommend implementing lectures in an interactive way, i.e. by involving the students themselves in the teaching process, e.g. by preparing suggestions, questions for the teacher, studying the set texts, articles on the subject, etc. According to these recommendations, lectures should not only be a monologue of the lecturer. Taking these recommendations into account, we believe that the lecture as a method of teaching is as beneficial to students in their preparation as the seminar or practise. Lectures are very important to get acquainted with new and complex issues, but in this case (the issue of teaching pupils with special educational needs) it is necessary to gain real experience, and seminars should certainly not be skipped. We can state that on average there are 4.2 subjects per university devoted to the topic of pupils with special educational needs.

The contents or curricula of the individual subjects were important information in the information sheets. From the number of all teaching subjects focused on inclusive education and preparing students to work with students with special educational needs, we identified 18 (out of 38) that devote their entire content and scope to the subject. We accepted the remaining subjects (20) in the preparation for inclusive education and work with pupils with special educational needs, as part of their content is necessary for students of teacher education programmes to identify the norm, sub-norm and supra-norm of pupil development.

A compulsory part of the information sheets of subjects is the "learning outcomes", which define the main learning outcomes that the student will gain from completing the subject and a description of what the student should know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of the learning process. In this component of the information sheets of subjects analysed, we observed large differences in the quality of the workmanship. In some information sheets of subjects we encountered only a very general indication of what is required of the student, and it was very difficult to identify in them, in relation to the taxonomy mentioned above, at what level the subject developed the knowledge, skills, competences of the students. We also encountered an incompatibility between the content focus and the learning outcomes, which did not reflect all the topics that make up the content of the subject. Very often we identified that part of the learning outcomes was not processed in the view of the student, but in the view of the teacher of the subject. Teacher actions were named and not student outcomes. The sixteen information sheets of subjects in the learning outcomes section of the information sheets of subjects were developed with respect to all three levels: knowing, understanding, being able to. Based on the analysis of the individual information sheets of subjects (in the content focus section), we can conclude that the pre-graduate preparation is not focused on the performance of student teachers in an inclusive school, but the core focus is on the integrated education of pupils. We are aware that teacher education is not only made up of subjects of the so-called common core, but also of subjects of individual study-subject combinations, whose curricula can compensate for these shortcomings of the common core. However, this area was not the subject of our research (Osvaldová, Vrabcová, 2020; Belková, Vrabcová, 2021).

Bansal (2016) also examined the curriculum for inclusive teacher education in thirteen universities in the northern part of India using the content analysis method. He found that the subject of Inclusive Education is not compulsory in some universities and completely absent in some universities, this finding is consistent with ours. The author further found that the subjects that cover content on Inclusive Education are theoretical knowledge based and lack linkage with practical skill building, we found this in 22 subject fact sheets.

In the new description of the profile of the graduate of the study field of teaching, the requirement of preparation for inclusive education is already incorporated. It is therefore essential in the context of pre-graduate preparation that teacher education students are trained in a variety of areas, including through the use of activating methods. Priority will be given to subjects that deal 100% of their content with the issue of working with pupils with special educational needs. In particular, the subject "Special Pedagogy", in which the students of teaching learn about the objectives, content, methods of special pedagogy. They acquire knowledge about the causes of disabilities, developmental anomalies, the characteristics and specifics of individual types of defects, the personality of pupils with disabilities, disorders, the possibilities of their upbringing and education, possible limitations that the disability or disorder brings with it. They are also introduced to the basics of inclusive education (Information sheet Special Education). Another subject is "Inclusive Pedagogy", after completing it the student will gain relevant theoretical knowledge and practical skills related to the concept of inclusive education for all pupils without distinction in mainstream education. (Information sheet Inclusive Pedagogy).

4 Discussion: Results of findings

For the objective indicators, based on the content analysis of the individual information sheets of subjects (in the content focus section), we found that the undergraduate training is not focused on the teachers' performance in an inclusive school, but the core focus is on the integrated education of pupils, and the most preferred teaching method is lecture. We found that out of the 38 subjects devoted to the issue of working with pupils with special educational needs and inclusive education, 12 are obligatory, 21 are obligatory elective and 5 are elective. From the number of all

teaching subjects devoted to inclusive education and preparation of students for work with pupils with special educational needs, we identified 18 (out of 38) that devote their entire content and scope to the subject. We accepted the remaining subjects (20) in the preparation for inclusive education and work with pupils with special educational needs, as part of their content is necessary for students of teacher education programmes to identify the norm, sub-norm and supra-norm of pupil's development.

5 Conclusion

The issue under study is currently topical and requires more attention not only in the aspect of pre-graduate preparation but also in the postgraduate preparation of in-service teachers (Lechta, 2012b).

This will not only contribute to the quality of preparation of graduates for their profession as teachers, but also to the growth of the level of perceived professional proficiency in inclusive practice. We consider it important that not only the preparation of teachers themselves, but also the preparation of the environments they enter, is addressed not only by support measures, but also by the preparation of children and pupils themselves from an early age (Kováčová, 2019).

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Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AM