

Analysis of classroom management and approaches to the training of classroom teachers in Slovakia and abroad

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Abstract

The goal of every head teacher is to have quality, responsible, professional class teachers with a high degree of independence. The activities and competencies of the class teacher are specified, except for Act no. 138/2019 and so in other implementing regulations to the Act no. 245/2008 on Upbringing and Education (School Act). A detailed description of the class teacher competencies is absent in the mentioned documents. Following the above, the main part of the paper is the analysis of current already realized research findings in the field of classroom management and the approaches to the training of class teachers in Slovakia and abroad. We consider it necessary to pay increased attention to undergraduate teacher training in a given field. The results of the analysis will be subsequently implemented in the training of university students for specific situations related to the key competencies of the class teacher in primary and secondary schools.

Keywords:

Classroom management
Class teacher
Key competencies
Undergraduate training
In-service teacher training

1 Introduction

International researches suggest that good management is an important moment in effective teaching (Marzano, Marzano and Pickering 2003). No other parameter is as unambiguously and firmly tied to performance to provide advanced performance as quality classroom management (Helmke, 2003, p. 78). Good management is reported to positively affect student performance, while poor classroom management results in lost teaching and learning time and poor educational outcomes (Jones and Jones 2012). The effective implementation of classroom management is closely linked to the competencies and skills a classroom teacher should have. Changing common strategies that we think are right is not an easy process. For the development of the required competencies and skills, such as the implementation of innovations, it is necessary to create suitable conditions and provide support from the school management, parents and the students themselves. They are the bearers of innovation and, together with them, the teachers and classroom teachers whose changes affect them the most. The activities and competencies of the class teacher are specified, except for Act no. 138/2019 and so in other implementing regulations to the Act no. 245/2008 on Upbringing and Education (School Act). A detailed description of the classroom teacher's competencies is absent in the mentioned documents. At present, there are no research findings in Slovakia that would monitor the educational needs of classroom teachers and could be applicable in the undergraduate training of future teachers. In this context, the main part of the paper is an analysis of current research findings in the field of classroom management and approaches to the training of classroom teachers in Slovakia and abroad.

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The teacher's ability to manage the classroom should be developed at the beginning of the teaching career, as it causes the most significant difficulties for beginning teachers (Zabalza, Marcelo, 1993). In the current undergraduate training, there is no university textbook that would reflect scientific knowledge in the field. Therefore, we consider it necessary to pay increased attention to the issue of undergraduate training in the field of classroom management. Based on available resources (study plans, course information sheets), we do not record individual classroom management courses at Slovak universities. The teaching of classroom management takes place rather than an integrated part in other courses in the field of pedagogy, especially didactics. Based on the reflections of students after completing compulsory teaching practice, we believe that it is necessary to support the creation of a battery of didactic materials that would help prepare students for problem areas of classroom teacher function (cooperation and communication with parents, management of parent association, classroom management, classroom administrative work, etc.). Although the research focused on the subject matter was carried out in Slovakia, its result is data that do not take into account the current problems of classroom management. They were more closely focused, for example, on the educational work of the classroom teacher by implementing elements of experiential pedagogy (Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, 2010-2011), or on personal and social education as part of lifelong education of classroom teachers (DTI University in Dubnica nad Váhom, 2013-2014).

2 Approaches to the training of class teachers in Slovakia and abroad

At present, professional standards are valid in Slovak education for individual categories and subcategories of pedagogical and vocational employees, including classroom teachers (Instruction of The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, No. 39/2017). The competency profile of the classroom teacher is divided into three parts: child/pupil, classroom management and professional development. In the area of child/pupil, competences are included at various levels related to the identification of individual and developmental characteristics of the child/pupil and the identification of the socio-cultural context of child/pupil development. In the area of classroom management, competencies related to mastering the content of specialization, planning and designing classroom teacher activities, implementing classroom teacher activities, evaluating the course and results of classroom teacher activities are included. Within professional development, these are competencies related to the planning and implementation of one's professional development and self-development, and to identification with the role of specialist and school. However, there is still no clear idea of the activities and tasks of the classroom teacher in the Slovak professional literature. In the Czech Republic, the position and activities of the class teacher are also dealt with only partially by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in some methodological guidelines and decrees.

In this context, we have compiled a demonstration of the principles and expected competencies in the work of a classroom teacher in a selected primary school in the United Kingdom: (<https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/16404368/class-teacher-jdps.pdf>)

General expectations:

- Responsibility for learning and achievement of all students in the classroom, equal opportunities for all.
- Responsibility for achieving the highest possible standards at work.
- Treat students with dignity, build relationships based on mutual respect and adhere to reasonable boundaries appropriate to the professional position of the teacher.
- Work proactively and effectively in collaboration and partnership with students, parents/carers, other staff and external agencies in the best interests of students.
- Act within the legal framework that sets out professional duties and responsibilities and in accordance with the obligations set out in the applicable school document for teachers and the document.

We agree with the statement of the authors Kalin et.al. (2017), that classroom management can never be focused solely on the provision of adequate discipline conditions for learning and teaching, but it is significantly related to the teacher's planning of learning activities of students, cooperation among them, learning from each other, and providing quality feedback to individuals and learning groups in achieving educational goals. Therefore, teachers should have proper skills, especially in the face of a great diversity of students in the classroom, proceeding from the inclusion of students with special needs and gifted students. Authors in their study present the results of an empirical study on students' perceptions on teachers' classroom management competencies in two different subjects, mathematics and Slovene language. A total of 907 students from elementary and secondary schools in Slovenia participated in the study. Differences in students' assessments have been established in reference to school level and subject. Students' responses show that secondary school teachers

are more focused on achieving educational goals, while aspects of forming a suitable class climate remain less important. The components of quality classroom management (maintenance of supportive learning climate, trusting students) are present in Slovene classes to a larger extent in comparison to maths classes, particularly at the elementary school level. Oliver, Reschly (2007) claim, that effective classroom management requires a comprehensive approach, including structuring the school and classroom environment, employing active supervision of student engagement, implementing classroom rules and routines, enacting procedures to encourage and using data to monitor student behavior and modifying classroom management procedures as needed. Emmer, Stough (2001) mention two key principles follow of classroom management resulting from their scientific studies:

- Good management is preventive rather than reactive.
- Teachers help create well-managed classrooms by identifying and teaching desirable behaviors to their students.

Authors also claim, that at the beginning of the school year, effective teachers had a clear conception of what student behaviors were desired, and they taught these expectations to students in several ways. They established rules or guidelines for desired behaviors; they planned and taught routines and procedures for class activities to students (a task that could take several weeks in complex settings); and they monitored student behavior and work carefully so that initial problems were detected and corrected before inappropriate behavior could become established. The emphasis during the first few weeks of instruction was to provide successful academic experiences, with feedback to students designed to help them learn desirable behavior in the context of their academic activities. This early emphasis resulted in a more positive climate and student cooperation throughout the year. Effective teachers maintained their management system by monitoring and providing prompt feedback, pacing class activities to keep them moving, and consistently applying classroom procedures and consequences (Emmer, Stough, 2001).

In our current vocational literature, we find research related to the position and tasks of the classroom teacher, which we present in the following part of the paper.

The aim of Krátká's research (2007) was to identify the degree of existing consistency or discrepancy between the functions of a classroom teacher as reflected by classroom teachers. The content of the research problem included classroom relationships, classroom teacher collaboration with families, relationships and collaborations with colleagues and school management, and career guidance. The research method was a quantitative research procedure. Krátká's research itself took place on several levels - the activities of the classroom teacher were evaluated by the classroom teachers, the school management, the parents of the students and the pupils themselves. The first research sample consisted of 240 class teachers and the second consisted of 248 primary and secondary school pupils. The most frequently mentioned educational questions addressed by classroom teachers were about behavior, achievement, the discipline of students, absences, unification of requirements of teachers, behavior towards teachers, social and family background of students, health problems, unjustified absences and finally social pathological phenomena. The most frequently mentioned problems - the topics addressed by the classroom teacher with the educational counselor were: specific learning disabilities, behavior, future professional orientation of students, social background, absence, mental problems, disadvantage, unjustified absence, bullying, drugs and alcohol, health problems. Problems - topics that classroom teachers most often solve with parents of students: welfare, behavior, absence, home preparation, non-compliance with school rules, individual peculiarities, specific learning disabilities, professional orientation, social situation of the family, drugs and alcohol, quality of practice. The author monitored the results from the pupils' point of view and opinion with an indirect question: "Imagine that the class teacher would be abolished at your school tomorrow, what do you think would affect your class? As many as 41% of pupils thought it would be worse without a classroom teacher, 23% of pupils thought it would be much worse, and 21% of pupils assumed that nothing would change. In the research, the author also focused on educational issues that pupils address with their classroom teachers (listed from most common to least common): absence, behavior, benefit, other teachers, career guidance, drugs and alcohol, health problems, specific learning disabilities, family situation. The characteristics of the ideal classroom teacher, which the pupils gave in order from the most emphasized to the less important, are: good, understanding, kind, friendly, kind, selfless, calm, cool, humor, patience, authority, respect, rigor, fairness, justice, interest in class, class negotiation, expertise, intelligence, tolerant, not very strict, communicative, welcoming, young, nice, sympathetic. The author found in the research that the length of the period during which the pupils have the same classroom teacher has a very positive effect. The longer pupils have one classroom teacher, the better they know him, the more they trust him, the more often they solve various problems, the more positive they evaluate and the more importance they give him.

In her research, Završánová (2008) focused on finding out the ideas of classroom teachers and pupils about "Ideal class teacher", finding out the attitudes of classroom teachers towards themselves and finding out the attitudes of pupils towards the classroom teacher. In the research, she also focused on the activities and attitudes of classroom teachers, which they consider to support and unite their class team. The research sample consisted of 12 class teachers and 194 pupils. As a research method, the author used a semi-structured interview with classroom teachers and essays written by pupils. The author compared the results of analyzes of the obtained data at three levels: the statements of pupils from individual classes with the statements of their classroom teachers, the statements of all classroom teachers as one research group and the statements of all pupils as the second research group and the statements of the whole group of pupils with a group of classroom teachers. From the above research, the author found that the ideal classroom teacher from the point of view of pupils and classroom teachers is human, friendly, but also has authority. Pupils also think that the ideal classroom teacher should be fair, understanding, and able to advise and help students. Classroom teachers also say that in order for a classroom teacher to be ideal, he should have fewer pupils, so he could pay more attention to each pupil, he could know the family background of each pupil, and he would also know his parents. Most classroom teachers do not see themselves as the ideal classroom teacher, each of them sees opportunities for improvement. Both groups (classroom teachers and pupils) agreed that it was important for the teacher to know and understand his students and to talk to them a lot. If a classroom teacher knows his class, he knows what he can do to make the pupils in his class get along or help each other. Both teachers and pupils think that the class team brings together extracurricular activities as well as class trips, where everyone behaves more relaxed than at school. Pupils consider it important if the classroom teacher is also funny, he can have fun, can laugh with his pupils, which can also benefit the whole team.

The aim of Bođo's research (2011) was to find out what is the importance of the classroom teacher's function, what educational issues the classroom teacher mainly deals with, which subjects the classroom teacher cooperates with to solve individual problems, how demanding the function of a classroom teacher is, what are the conditions for its implementation, what helps classroom teachers the most in preparation for the performance of their function and what are the specifics of classroom teacher communication with pupils and their parents. The author carried out the research using a questionnaire method on a sample of 129 respondents. It turned out that classroom teachers attach great importance to their function, they assume that the school management assigns them only a little lower, and they expect the average importance of their function in the parents' perceptions. The research question that classroom teachers from different levels of school give different meanings to their function was confirmed. Primary school teachers attached higher importance to their position (and also expected it from their parents and school management). Similarly, the hypothesis of different perceptions of the importance of their function by classroom teachers differing in length of practice was confirmed. It turns out that teachers with the longest experience attach (and also expect from parents and school leaders) their position. On the contrary, teachers with medium-long experience in office (2-10 years) attach the lowest importance to their position. The experience gained from the teaching profession helped the respondents the most in their readiness to perform the function of a classroom teacher, in the second place the class teachers were helped by their own parental experience and only in the third-place pedagogy and psychology within the teacher training study. The question was confirmed that classroom teachers with different lengths of experience have different views on what helped them most in their readiness to perform the function of a classroom teacher. Classroom teachers with the longest experience place the greatest emphasis on pedagogical and parental experience. It is interesting to note that classroom teachers with the shortest experience as classroom teachers also attach the greatest importance to pedagogical experience. The classroom teacher and his activities are located in a broader system of subjects such as other school teachers, school management, or pupils' parents. The author of the research dealt with the question of how often they solve individual problems with the mentioned factors. With other teachers at the school, classroom teachers often deal with behavioral problems and benefit problems. The question of the different areas that classroom teachers, who differ in the length of their internship, deal with other teachers, was also confirmed in part. It turned out that classroom teachers with a medium length of experience (2-10 years) deal with problems in behavior, achievement and also absence more often than teachers with longer or shorter experience. However, these were very small differences. With teachers' parents, classroom teachers often deal with problems of well-being, behavior, and absence. It was partially confirmed that classroom teachers from individual school levels deal with pupils' parents differently often individual educational issues. Classroom teachers at the first level deal more often with their parents with the issue of specific learning disabilities. And at the lower secondary school level, the issue of pupils' home preparation, performance, but also behavior and offenses against the school rules is addressed with the parents.

Classroom teachers consider their function to be highly demanding. They see the focus of complexity primarily in high responsibility, solving problems in students' behavior, solving relationships in the classroom and also in relation to the time and administrative demands of the function. Classroom teachers consider the conditions for the performance of their duties to be good. In the research, the author confirmed that classroom teachers from different levels of schools have different views on specific conditions. They were described as good by classroom teachers at the first stage (primary level) of primary school, and by average classroom teachers at the second-grade degree (lower secondary level). The current financial evaluation for the function of a classroom teacher is considered bad by classroom teachers.

Sadik, Akbulut (2015) also present the result of their scientific study conducted on a sample of N=1000 teachers. They found that teachers found themselves poorer in collaboration with school administration, parents and educational counseling services and educational issues. The reason could be that teachers lack help from the councilors, schools lack materials, and students are passive in the learning process. In this respect, it can be concluded that teachers should take in-service training on attention-getting, generating motivation, teaching methods and techniques and material development.

3 Undergraduate training in classroom management

Quality in-service teacher training is one of the key topics in professional discussions devoted to content changes in undergraduate teacher training programs at universities. The current undergraduate study of future teachers emphasizes training in didactics, educational theory, research methodology, school management and other related disciplines, which result from the requirements of the description of the field of study 38. Teacher Training and Education Science, defined by the Accreditation Commission. Undergraduate teacher education graduates are thus often not confronted in practice with poor readiness in the field, but face problems rather than managing problematic situations in the classroom, maintaining discipline with students, or how communicating with students' legal representatives. J. Průcha states (2009) that based on the results of research carried out in the USA, Canada and Australia, beginning teachers encounter in practice problems such as maintaining discipline in the classroom, motivating students, developing relationships with parents, organizing students' work in the classroom, etc. A prerequisite for quality and effective teaching is therefore mastery of classroom management (Helmke, 2003). Based on the analysis of foreign sources, we found that the term "classroom management" is used in English terminology. However, there is no established terminology in the Slovak Republic that would distinguish between the terms classroom management and so-called management of the classroom. We adhere to the definition of classroom management according to Obdržálek and Horváthová (2004) and understand it, as a set of activities performed by each teacher in the management of the educational process and classroom management, in which we focus primarily on the function of the classroom teacher and his competencies and skills. As the issue of competencies was addressed in particular by Turek in the publication *Teacher Education for the 21st Century* (2001, p. 83). In Slovakia, Ľ. Višňovský and Z. Babicová, A. Šmáriková, J. Faktor and others. In our school practice, the publication Ch. Eichhorn (*Classroom management*, 2014), which, however, is based on school practice in Switzerland and also focuses on the effective management of the educational process. In pedagogical practice, a publication focused on the activities of a classroom teacher, prepared by a team of Slovak authors in cooperation with Ch. Eichhorn (*Classroom teacher*, 2016). The publication offers knowledge focused on the work of the classroom teacher, but rather from the point of view of teachers in practice. These publications cannot be considered current in relation to the current situation, as the position of the classroom teacher has changed significantly in the recent period.

In our opinion, in the undergraduate preparation of university students in teacher training programs, insufficient attention is paid to issues related to the scope of work and the role of the classroom teacher in the school in Slovakia. Increased attention is paid to professional didactic training in individual subjects, less emphasis is placed on teaching courses devoted to specific issues of education and the role of the classroom teacher in solving various problem situations at school.

We also encounter certain difficulties in the training of teachers in the field of classroom management abroad. Greenberg, Putman, Walsch (2014) from the *National Council of Teacher Quality* mention examining a sample of 122 teacher preparation programs in which they were able to review the full breadth of the professional sequence — including lecture schedules, teacher candidate assignments, practice opportunities, instruments used to observe and provide feedback on teaching episodes, and textbooks — they can conclude the following:

- Most programs can correctly claim to cover classroom management, with only a tiny fraction (less than 3 percent) in the sample ignoring instruction altogether;

- Most teacher preparation programs do not draw from research when deciding which classroom management strategies are most likely to be effective and therefore taught and practiced;
- Instruction is generally divorced from practice (and vice versa) in most programs, with little evidence that what gets taught gets practiced;
- Contrary to the claims of some teacher educators, effective training in classroom management cannot be embedded throughout teacher preparation programs.

Despite the latest conclusion of Greenberg, Putman, Walsch (2014), we consider that classroom management can be and should be embedded throughout teacher preparation programs.

4 Conclusion

At the end of the article, we would like to state that in our Slovak education there is no increased attention paid to the position and specific activities of the classroom teacher in the school. There are also no compact publications and guidelines for classroom teacher work. Furthermore, we dare to say that even in the undergraduate training of university students in teacher training programs, insufficient attention is paid to the preparation for the specific work of a classroom teacher. They also lack quality training and courses for classroom teachers in practice, which would further develop their competencies, for example in diagnostics in the field of classroom management depending on the type of problem and needs of students, planning and designing activities supporting the development of students' personal and social skills. Solving problems in learning and behavior of individual students, etc. School practice and scientific findings also point to the difficult work of the classroom teacher in communication and cooperation with the pupils' parents. In this area, we should pay more attention to class teacher support through training, courses, but also close cooperation with professional staff in the school (school psychologist, school special pedagogue), school management and other experts from various institutions. Research also shows that current classroom teachers in our education system are burdened with administration, time, high responsibilities or low powers. The position and activity of the classroom teacher is an extremely important part not only of the school as a whole, but it is an important factor in ensuring a favorable climate and atmosphere in the classroom, it can also affect the further development of a group of students or an individual. The research we plan to carry out as part of the KEGA project below is therefore intended to help the school management to improve the work of classroom teachers and to help teachers themselves to adapt to the role of the classroom teacher and, last but not least, to improve undergraduate teacher training in classroom management.

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