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PROFESSIONAL PROFILES OF TEACHERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Dana Masaryková, Branislav Pupala
(Eds.)

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for Early Childhood Education and Care

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THE TERMINOLOGY OF ECEC

Arianna Kitzinger (Hungary)

1. An introduction

Each profession has its own terminology and educational sciences are not an exception either. Terminology basically belongs to the territory of linguistics, yet it is unavoidable to delve into the related profession we examine. According to the different professions several dictionaries have been published that explain the words either from etymological or professional aspects or sometimes from both. Dictionaries can be either monolingual which provides readers with special glossaries or bilingual which intends to help language learners of the given subject. However, there are well-known English language dictionaries of business (Law, 2009), medicine (Kent, 2006), engineering (Escudier and Atkins, 2019), linguistics (Matthews, 2014) or pedagogy (Wallace, 2015), the choice is limited in terms of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in spite of the fact that nursery and kindergarten staff do use special terms in their everyday routine. These terms are usually taught to teacher trainees during their university studies, mostly in the framework of subjects like pedagogy or psychology, to a much smaller extent in linguistics. Here a special ECEC vocabulary is explored and explained on the basis of the Kindergarten Mini-lexicon (Körmöci, 2015), which clarifies the terminology of the kindergarten from a pedagogical point of view in the Hungarian language and with the help of the online Hungarian etymological dictionary (Magyar, 2022).

2. The sociolinguistic background

Why are we embarrassed when we want to explain Hungarian ECEC terms in an intercultural setting? It has several reasons among which the most important ones are as follows:

1. **The origin of the Hungarian language**
2. **Cultural and historical differences**
3. **Political changes**

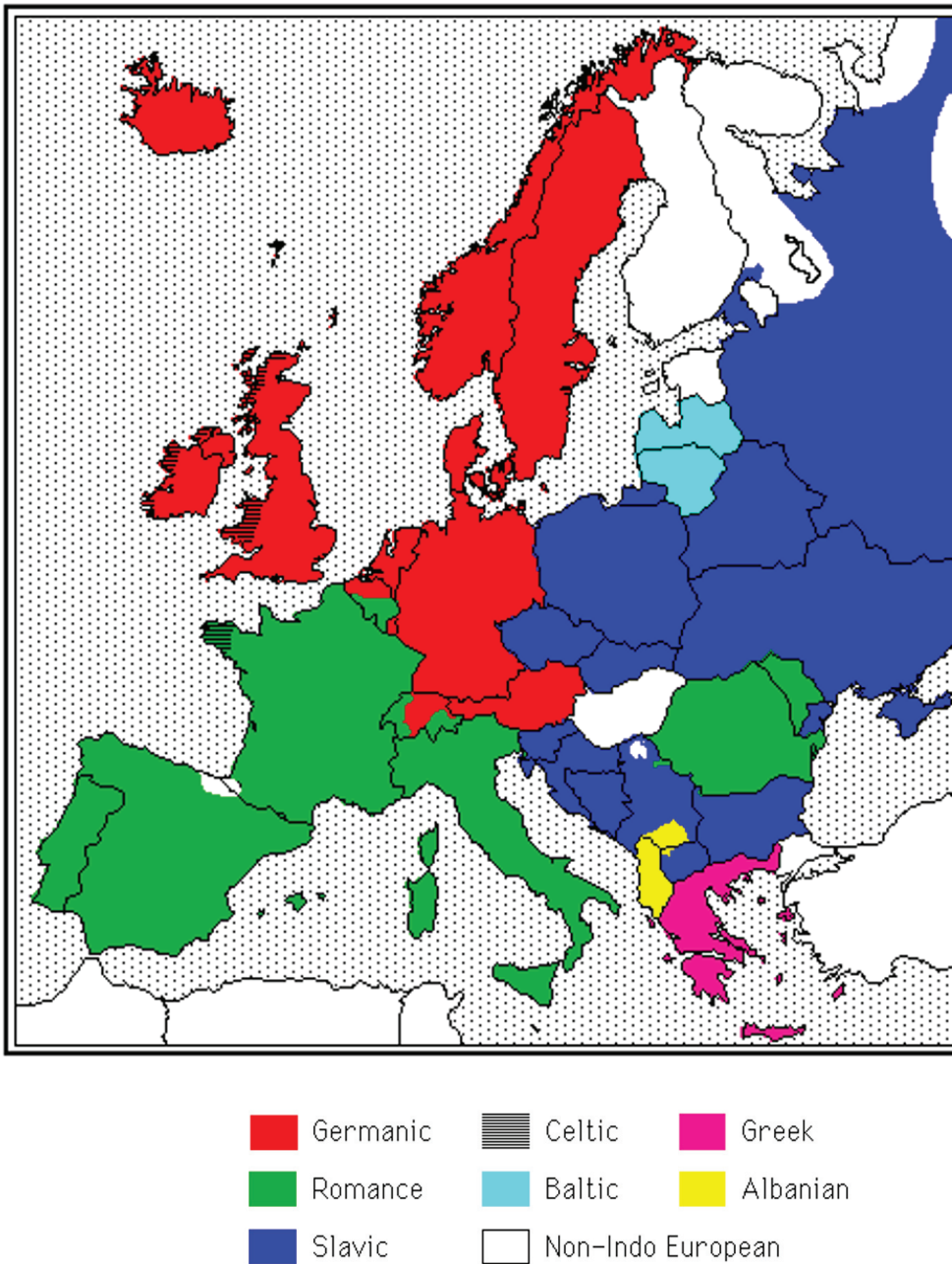


Figure 1. *Indo-European subfamilies in Europe (Indo-European, 2022)*

On the other hand, language also conveys the manifestation of culture and history which often were on different tracks in Europe. These differences and especially the divergent course of history have made their mark on the development of European countries involving their political and educational systems. Therefore, different phenomena had to be provided with different names.

Last but not least, the political changes of the recent past taking place in post-communist countries have also made an impact on education. The changes manifested in educational reforms have brought new ideas and new terminology as well.

In this study, we try to show a brief panoramic view of pre-school education through the terminology of different areas. The focus is especially on kindergarten pedagogy where the light will be shed on the context (institutions, documents and training), on the operation of the actors (staff and children) and the activities in the indoor and outdoor space. In addition, the written appearance of the language, i.e. the linguistic landscape as a recently discovered part of modern linguistics, will be displayed.

3. The educational context

3.1 Institutions

In Hungary, the education system can be divided into two parts: institutions such as kindergarten, primary and secondary schools belong to public education while universities to higher or tertiary education. Crèche does not belong to the education system at all, but to the health and child welfare sector. From a linguistic point of view, it is worth examining the basic names of the institutions as some of them already convey the meaning and the function of the given establishment.

It is not surprising that the common name of educational institutions, i.e., *iskola* comes from the Latin *schola*, whose basic meaning is ‘an institution that deals with education. The same word can be observed in several Indo-European and Finno-Ugric languages (Table 1):

Table 1. **The word ‘school’ in different languages**

Word	Language	Language family
<i>schola</i>	Latin	Latin
<i>scuola</i>	Italian	Romance
<i>school</i>	English	Germanic
<i>Schule</i>	German	
<i>школа</i>	Russian	Slavic
<i>koulu</i>	Finnish	Finno-Ugric (Non-Indo European)
<i>iskola</i>	Hungarian	

While the listed Indo-European words have kept the original Latin beginning of the word, Finno-Ugric languages avoid consonant clusters, therefore both Finnish and Hungarian break them by dropping initial consonants and inserting a vowel (Hng: at the beginning of the word, Fin: after the first consonant).

Although *bölcsőde* falls out of the scope of official education, it can be discussed here, under the umbrella of early childhood education and care (ECEC). *Bölcsőde* is the declined form of *bölcső*, which is of Old Turkic origin and means the same as the English *cradle*. With the *-de* declension (*bölcső+de*) the meaning will result in ‘the place where children from 0 to 3 years can go’.

The same morphological structure can be noticed in the word *óvoda*, which is also a declined word, but in this case declined from a verb, not from a noun as in the case of *bölcső* → *bölcsőde*. The stem here is the verb *óv*, which means ‘protect’. Therefore, the literal meaning of *óv+oda* is ‘the place where children are protected’. In Hungary, between the ages of 3 and 6/7.

3.2 Documents

The most important document of Hungarian kindergarten education is called ÓNAP (Óvodai nevelés országos alapprogramja/Basic National Programme of Kindergarten Education) (363/2012), which in its name phases the major aim of the document, i.e. to give a guideline to kindergarten education. It is mostly used in its abbreviated form, and the words involved are self-explanatory:

- *óvodai* → the adjectival form of *óvoda* with the *-i* inflection means ‘connected with/ related to kindergarten’
- *nevelés* → *nevel+és*, where *nevel* (‘educate/raise up’) is the stem and *-és* is the suffix which makes a noun out of a verb: *nevel+és* = *educate+ion*
- *országos* → *ország* = country/ nation; *ország+os* = national, where *ország* is the stem while *-os* ending makes an adjective out of a noun, i.e. *nation+al*
- *alapprogram* → a compound noun (*alap+program*) where *alap* means ‘basic’ and *program* is the internationally used form of the Greek word, *programma*. The final inflection *-ja* serves as a possessive affix, i.e. ‘somebody’s programme’

3.3 Training

In Hungary, ECEC professionals attend a three-year-long BA training. Although BA is often applied (with Hungarian pronunciation), the word ‘bachelor’ is rarely used. Instead, *alapképzés* is preferred, which means ‘basic training’.

Within the training different majors coexist, for instance, *óvodapedagógia* (‘kindergarten pedagogy’) and *csecsemő- és kisgyermeknevelés* (‘early childhood education’). In the latter, besides *early childhood* (‘kisgyermekkor’) the education of *infants* (‘csecsemő’) takes place as well. Students are called *hallgató* in Hungary, which, knowing its original meaning, might be confusing as the stem of the word is *hallgat* (‘listen to’) and *-ó* ending changes the part of speech, too (verb → noun).

Altogether the literal meaning is ‘listener’ which assumes passive participation in the classes.

4. The actors of ECEC

4.1 The staff

In kindergarten, there are basically two types of staff: the educational staff and the personnel (Table 2). In the crèche instead of the educational staff, we speak about nursery attendants. The terms connected with the staff will be explained in this chapter and summarised in the glossary (Appendix).

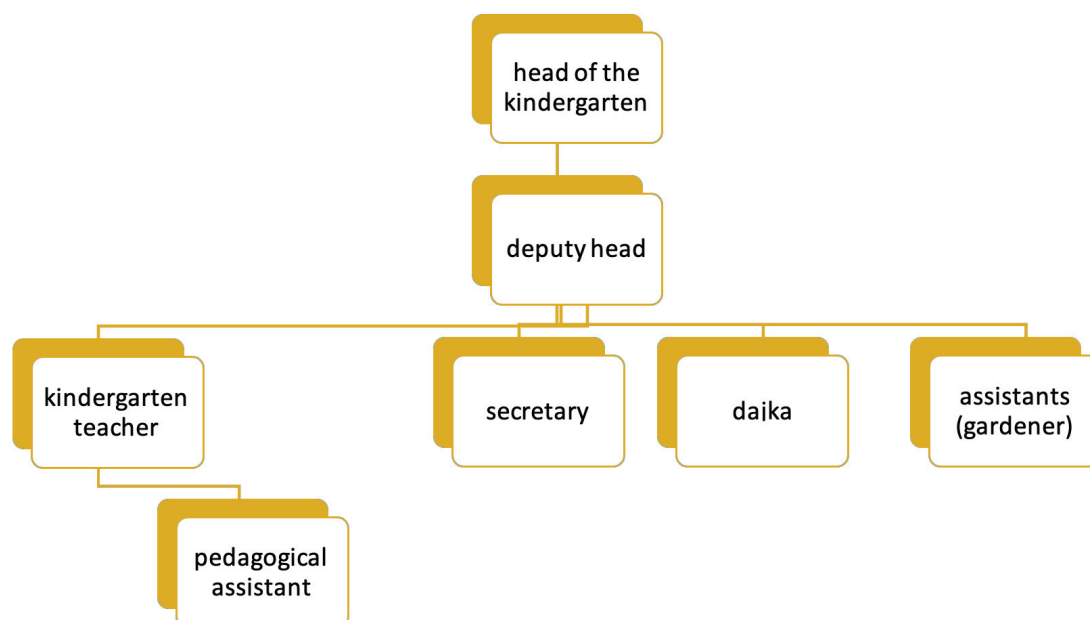


Table 2. *The structure of staff in a kindergarten*

In Hungarian, *óvónő* used to be applied to teachers who take care of children in kindergarten. The word *óvó* is an adjective derived from the verb *óv*, which means ‘protect’. In this way, the Hungarian *óvónő* is the person (*nő* = ‘woman’) who educates and tends children. However, in present-day Hungarian, the official name of kindergarten teachers is *óvodapedagógus*, which is a compound noun (*óvoda* = ‘kindergarten’, *pedagógus* = ‘educator’). The name is more appropriate in the modern age as *pedagógus* is gender-neutral (men can also pursue this occupation) and it also indicates that kindergarten teachers also belong to teachers; while the old name, *óvónő* did not have this connotation.

The head of the kindergarten is called *vezető óvodapedagógus* (usually a woman, so: *vezető óvónő*), where *vezető* means 'leading'. She has a deputy, who is called *helyettes* (*helyett* in Hungarian means 'instead of someone').

Besides kindergarten teachers, there are the personnel whose task is to tidy up the kindergarten, warm up meals and help children with non-educational activities (e.g. dressing them up). Their name is *dajka* (= 'nanny'), which derives from the verb *dajkál* (= 'nurse') and involves a very positive meaning in Hungarian. In addition, a *pedagógiai asszisztens* (= 'pedagogical assistant') can also be employed by a kindergarten. These persons work together with the teacher but they do not possess a degree in kindergarten education. Besides, there is usually a person who takes care of the garden and the machines in the institution, who is usually a man and called *karbantartó* (= 'a person who takes care of something in a form or institution').

In a crèche, the work is done by nursery attendants whose name in Hungarian is *gondozónő*. It is a compound noun from *gondozó* (= 'taking care') and *nő* (= 'woman').

In addition to the above-mentioned staff, there are professionals who contribute to the smooth functioning of the institutions and they are in close contact with the staff and children (Table 3). Some kindergartens employ *fejlesztőpedagógus* (= 'developmental pedagogue') who is responsible for children's proper development. Although they are not employed by the kindergarten, the kindergarten can ask for the help of a *pszichológus* (= 'psychologist') or *logopédus* (= 'speech therapist') and a *gyermekorvos* (= paediatrician; *gyermek* = 'child', *orvos* = 'medical doctor') regularly goes to the kindergarten to check children's physical development and health.



Table 3. **Professionals at children's service**

4.2 The children

Children are the subjects of ECEC, so it is important to get familiarised with their names as well. Children have two names in Hungarian: *gyerek* or *gyermek*. The first is used in standard Hungarian or colloquial language, while the latter is more sophisticated and used in higher registers of the language. The origin of both can be traced back to the Sumerian word: ger-mu.

Children in the crèche and in the kindergarten are divided into different groups called *csopot*. Although children today go to *vegyes csopot* (=‘mixed-age group’), inside the group children belong to *kis-* (=‘little’), *középső* (=‘middle’) and *nagy* (=‘big’) groups; according to age.

5. Spaces for activities

When a kindergarten is described it is worth taking into account the material conditions, too. Naturally, objects and furniture have their own names which can be divided into indoor and outdoor tools and equipment.

5.1 Indoor

A typical kindergarten is made up of different rooms which Hungarians do not call classrooms, but *csoporszoba* (=‘the room of the group’). Each group (= *csopot*) has its own *szoba*, *terem* (=‘room’) where children can play, eat and sleep. A room has different kinds of *asztal* (=‘table’), *szék* (=‘chair’), *szőnyeg* (=‘carpet’), *polc* (=‘shelf’), *faliújság* (=‘pinboard’), *játék* (=‘toy’) and *könyv* (=‘book’). Rooms usually have several territories where different activities are done, for instance, *babakonyha* (=‘doll’s kitchen’), *játszószőnyeg* (=‘carpet for playing’) or *olvasósarok* (=‘corner for reading’). Sometimes a room can possess a *galéria* (=gallery) which is a lifted platform and enlarges space.

5.2 Outdoor

A kindergarten usually has an *udvar* (=yard) where children can take possession of different equipment, e.g. *homokozó* (=‘sandpit’), *mászóka* (=‘monkey bar’), *libikóka* (=‘see-saw’) or *hinta* (=‘swings’). The outdoor space belonging to a house or building can be called either *udvar* (=‘yard’) or *kert* (=garden). The difference between meanings is similar to the English equivalents, i.e. an *udvar* (=‘yard’) is usually a large place (in a kindergarten it is similar to a playground) and a *kert* (=‘garden’) is for plants, flowers and vegetables.

5.3 Playing

The major function of the above-mentioned places, furnishings and materials is to play with or to play in. Therefore, the most important word in kindergarten must be *játék* (=‘play’). The word *játék* comes from the verb *játszik* (=‘play’) whose origin is not known. *Játék* as a noun has two major meanings: it means both ‘toy’ as an object and ‘play’ as an activity. It also has very different branches in the kindergarten like *szerepjáték* (=‘role play’), *bábjáték* (=‘puppetry’), *versenyjáték* (=‘competition game’) or *szabályjáték* (=‘games with rules’).

6. The linguistic landscape

Examining the linguistic landscape is a relatively new field of sociolinguistics that came into existence in the second half of the 20th century. The original idea was to observe the written linguistic messages, manifested in inscriptions, in a country, city or any geographical region. Little investigation has been launched in institutions. However, the linguistic landscape of a school can convey important information about education and the milieu. Such investigation is also missing in kindergartens, which gap can be filled to a certain extent in this study.

Empirical observations were made in the affiliated kindergarten called Benedek Elek Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Sopron called Lewinszky Anna Kindergarten. It seems to be an appropriate institution as, besides Hungarian, German and English are also developed here. Therefore, the observation meets the requirement of exploring multilingual landscapes, which was the original idea of linguistic landscape research. In this way, first, light is shed on the mother tongue landscape, then on that of foreign languages.

6.1 First language: Hungarian

As the kindergarten can be found in Hungary, the official language of the kindergarten is Hungarian. Therefore, it is the language of everyday communication and the vehicle language between teachers and parents. In this sense, the following types of messages can be found in the Hungarian linguistic landscape:

- official inscriptions and posters
- instructions
- information

Official inscriptions serve as the description of the institution, for instance, the name of the institution with the Hungarian coat-of-arms designates the type of the institution (i.e., a state kindergarten) while the posters naming the EU-project called *Új Magyarország* (=‘New Hungary’), under the auspices the kindergarten

was renovated, give visitors the information about an important event of the institution.

Instructions give short guidance to visitors about how to behave in the kindergarten and what kind of rules and regulations have to be kept. The present situation of the pandemic can be well figured out from these notices: for instance, how to disinfect hands, the rule of wearing a mask in the building or how to keep the necessary distance (Figure 2)¹. Besides, helping instructions (how to open the door with a doorbell) and prohibitions, for instance, about smoking, also appear.

Information is usually for parents and mostly about everyday activities or coming programmes, for instance, activities of the week or timely holidays (sometimes with pictures and a short description of the history of the celebration). Information is displayed on the notice boards in the corridor or in the classroom. In this kindergarten, a special wall is devoted to the person, Anna Lewinszky, after whom the kindergarten was named. The display case, where her life story is told, is the first that visitors can see (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Notice about using a mask



Figure 3. Anna Lewinszky's display case

1) Photos were taken by the author with the kind permission of the head teacher of the kindergarten.

6.2 Foreign languages

Lewinszky Anna Kindergarten houses German and English early childhood development in three groups: German as a minority language is going on in two groups and has had long traditions since 1959. English is dealt with in the frame of English in kindergarten specialisation, which started in 2006.

6.2.1 German

German is firmly linked with the German minority's life and culture in Hungary (Figure 4) and this fact is clearly shown in the German linguistic landscape of the kindergarten. Inscription in German definitely has a teaching aim: it appears, together with the pictures of old costumes of the German minority on the pin board in one of the rooms, and in the title of traditional German tales displayed in the other room. Apart from cultural hints, several German language-related objects can be seen, for instance, a clock with a German inscription (Figure 5) or a table with the names of the seasons and days. Some charts provide children with guidance, for instance about daily programmes (e.g. *Spieltag/Day of play* or *Obsttag/Day of fruits*).

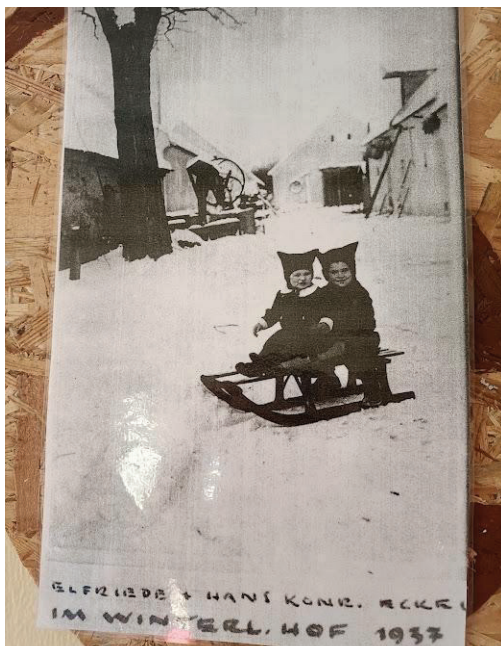


Figure 4. *Sledging German people*



Figure 5. *A clock with German inscription*

6.2.2 English

English as a global language does not bear as many cultural connotations as German, and its appearance is also scarce. Besides some English language books, only a greeting on the door (*Good morning!*) (Figure 6) and the pin board inside reveal that there is English language development in this institution. However, the contents of the pin board, under the name '*First words in English*' (Figure 7), are regularly changed, according to the weekly themes of the children group.



Figure 6. *Good morning – on the door*



Figure 7. *First words in English*

6.3 Special signs

Besides living languages, the kindergarten, after its renovation in 2010, has also placed inscriptions in Braille writing. Therefore, the name of each room (rooms of children groups, changing rooms, toilets, etc.) can also be decoded by visually challenged people, too (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Braille writing on the changing room and toilet

7. Summary

In the previous chapters, the language used in kindergarten education and the language of the kindergarten as a building came into focus. Some special Hungarian words were discussed, especially when they differ from the internationally used names and if they tell us something special about the culture and the educational setting. Thus, we got familiarised with the names of the staff, training, children groups, objects and places. As the written appearance of languages is also an organic part of early childhood education, a special emphasis was put on the visible manifestation of languages in the frame of examining the linguistic landscape.

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APPENDIX

Glossary of the staff

Hungarian	English equivalent	Meaning in the Hungarian context
<i>óvodapedagógus</i>	'kindergarten teacher'	qualified pedagogue (BA) who deals with children between 3 and 6
<i>óvónő</i>	'kindergarten teacher'	female kindergarten teacher
<i>vezető óvodapedagógus</i>	'head of kindergarten'	who leads the kindergarten
<i>vezető helyettes</i>	'deputy head'	the head teacher's direct collaborator
<i>pedagógiai asszisztens</i>	'pedagogical assistant'	non-qualified pedagogue who can be employed by the kindergarten to help with educational tasks
<i>dajka</i>	'nanny'	the person whose task is to tidy up the kindergarten, warm up meals and help children with non-educational activities
<i>karbantartó</i>	'caretaker'	a person who takes care of something in a form or institution
<i>gondozó</i>	'nurse'	qualified pedagogue (BA) who deals with children between 0 and 3
<i>fejlesztőpedagógus</i>	'developmental pedagogue'	a person who is responsible for children's proper development
<i>logopédus</i>	'speech therapist'	a person who helps children with speech impediments
<i>pszichológus</i>	'psychologist'	a person who helps children with psychological problems
<i>gyermekorvos</i>	'paediatrician'	a doctor who checks children's physical development and health

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN BULGARIA FOR THE PERIOD AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR TILL NOW DAYS

Emil Buzov, Boryana Zdravkova (Bulgaria)

Bulgaria was founded as a state in 681 AD and in its development had gone through periods of literary, economic and political prosperity, but also through periods of decline and loss of independence. Especially strong is its development at the beginning of the 10th century when it had great influence on Eastern European peoples through its schools and literature. Bulgaria is the first state which adopted the Cyrillic alphabet (this alphabet was created at the explicit request of the then Bulgarian ruler, Tsar Boris I), and in a short time thousands of Bulgarians were trained in the educational centres established in the country. The present Bulgarian state was restored in 1878 in the form of a monarchy, which in 1946 was replaced by a Soviet-style peoples' republic. The socialist system existed until 1990, after which Bulgaria assumed the path of liberal democracy and the market economy. In 2004 the country joined NATO, and in 2007 it joined the European Union.

1. Development of preschool education in the period 1944-1989

The first public kindergarten in Bulgaria was opened in Svishtov in 1882. Its creator was Nikola Zhivkov – a teacher, book writer and public figure. Other kindergartens were opened in Plovdiv (1884), in Sofia (1888), Ruse (1889), Asenovgrad (1889), Klisura (1889), Pazardzhik (1890), Balchik (1890), Pleven (1891), Razgrad (1891), and Dobrich (1893).

At the end of 1944 the political power in Bulgaria changed and by the end of 1989 it was one of the countries in which the socialist model of development was established. Pre-school education, as well as education in general, is developing in the conditions and according to the ideology of the new socio-political system. In the spirit of the new ideological paradigm, the government pays serious attention to education and its key role in shaping the socialist personality. The coverage of all children in the system of public pre-school education (*this concept identifies pre-school education in the period under consideration*) is rising into state policy and a leading strategic task for the whole society.

1.1 Legal basis of preschool education in the period 1944-1989

One of the first steps in restructuring the education system to meet new societal needs and goals is the adoption of a new legal framework to regulate the structure and functioning of the public education system. In 1946, **the Law on Public Care and Upbringing of the Child** was promulgated, which approved the network of bodies at central and local level responsible for the activities of protection and upbringing of young children. In connection with the adoption of the new Constitution in 1947 and the need to create a new educational law to guarantee Bulgarian citizens the right to education, in 1948 the National Assembly passed the **Public Education Act (PEA)**. There is a special section in the law dedicated to preschool education. According to the text of the law, the main goal of pre-school education is "to provide children from 3 to 7 years of age with comprehensive physical and spiritual development in the spirit of socialism and to prepare them for primary school" (Article 33). This law suspends the effect of the Public Education Act adopted in 1909. The Ministry of Public Education determines the general policies and guidelines for the implementation of educational work, and the methodological guidance and control is carried out by the regional structures of the Ministry, included in the local administration. According to the PEA the functioning of kindergartens is regulated in regulations approved by the Minister of Education. The law approves **four types of kindergartens**: half-day, all-day, weekly and seasonal. There is no information when Crèche was established in Bulgaria during this period of time.

There are special requirements for opening half-day kindergartens; these can be found at schools if there are at least 30 children aged 6-7. They were under the administrative management of school managements (Article 39). The Law on Public Education decentralises the establishment and financing of preschools – kindergartens (full-time and weekly) are left to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and half-day and seasonal kindergartens are provided at the initiative of local governments – people's councils, government agencies, cooperatives and enterprises. **The Kindergarten Regulations**, adopted in 1949, regulate the specifics of different types of kindergartens, the admission of children and the types of benefits for some groups of families – large families, sick parents, divorced, the requirements for the qualification of the principal and the children's teacher, the regime in the kindergarten and the organisation of the main activities, the environment of the classrooms; the design of new buildings for use as kindergartens and the requirements for the menu for the day and for the week.

The regulations of 1949 practically formed the model of the Bulgarian kindergarten, which in its main elements was preserved until 1989.

In 1951, the Ministry of Public Education issued a **Guide to the work in kindergartens**, which determined the program content of educational work in them.

The new **Kindergarten Regulations** adopted in 1952 update the previous one, detailing all elements of the system – management, organisation, activities, interactions, etc.

In 1954 a **Guide for the Kindergarten Teacher was developed and approved**, which repealed the 1951 Instruction. The new methodological guide has the main goal of improving the quality of the educational process in the kindergarten. The Guide launched the ideas and new formulations of Soviet scientists in the field of preschool pedagogy.

In 1955, the Ministry of National Education adopted new **Regulations for kindergarten**. The aim is to impose stricter requirements to the internal structuring of the kindergarten and to the organisation of social conditions in it – hygiene, furniture, etc. In connection with these changes adopted an Instruction for work in kindergartens with overnight groups. Along with the legal regulation of the organisation in the system of pre-school education, methodological manuals and instructions related to the content of the educational work are also developed. Special guides have been issued for acquainting the child with nature, for learning the native language, for teaching arithmetic, as well as for all mandatory activities in the kindergarten with a focus on play.

In 1959 a new educational law was adopted which was called the **Law on Closer Connection of School with Life and on the Further Development of Public Education in Bulgaria**. The aim of which is to expand the so-called polytechnic content of education so that children can master work habits and skills at an early age. Preschool education is also within the scope of the law. In 1963, the **First national program for educational work in kindergarten** was adopted, which is a comprehensive system for carrying out educational activities through specific and accurately programmed content of the pedagogical process. A new moment in the Program is the differentiation of study units, as well as the precise regulation of the topics in the separate methodological units.

The program updated during the 1971-1972 school year is called the **Program for the educational work in the kindergarten**. Its development aims to improve the organisational conditions by modernising the forms and methods of education in order to ensure better preparation of the child for school. The educational content is oriented in this direction, which will contribute to the development of children's thinking, imagination and independence.

In 1975, the **Regulations for Kindergartens** were adopted, aimed at improving the administrative and management structure through: expanding the internal structure of the preschool education system, approval of new positions in the kindergarten, establishing internal hierarchy and organisational relationships and interdependencies.

The **Program for the educational work in the kindergarten**, approved in 1976, contains a number of innovative solutions, such as: changes in the content in the different areas, oriented to: acquainting children with the surrounding reality, development of mathematical concepts, development of phonemic hearing, development of technical skills and constructive knowledge in order to better prepare for school, along with the game, the labour activity is widely represented, which is included in the regime for the day with a permanent place and duration. Each methodological unit contains tasks, sample variants and means for its implementation; indicators included in the program for checking the results of the educational work with the child, orientation towards problem-based learning in order to stimulate the child's critical thinking, imagination, attention; focus on artistic activities with a view to building lasting aesthetic needs in the child and striving for active creativity. To help teachers, methodological manuals have been developed in all areas with included sample samples for conducting pedagogical activities.

In the 1970s, policies continued to be developed to improve the quality of education in kindergartens with a view to better preparing children for school. The priority task is the obligatory coverage of 3-6-year-old children in the system of pre-school education, as the labour education is strengthened in accordance with the approved new program for educational work in the kindergarten.

In 1979, the **Instruction for the organisation of educational work in kindergartens** was developed, the main task of which is to orient children's teachers to the use of more modern teaching methods and the application of more effective forms of play activities. It also provides guidance on improving the organisation of the daily routine.

Two years later, the so-called **Instruction N° 0-3 for the improvement of the educational work in the kindergartens (1981)**, which marks the beginning of a more complete reorganisation of the pedagogical process in the direction of: fulfilment of the pedagogical practice with new content, adequate to the reality and the set goals; more dynamic and complex planning of educational activities; optimal organisation of the management and professional work of the pedagogues, etc.

One of the last adopted documents in the system of socialist preschool education is the **Program for educational work in kindergartens since 1984**. It synthesises the already gained experience in scientific and practical terms not only at national but also at European level and establishes new principles and approaches to preschool education such as: science, developing nature of the program content and training, spirality, system-integrated approach, etc. 2.

1.2 Characteristics of preschool education in the period 1944-1989

In the first years of its rule, the new government began to restructure the preschool system from its base, increasing the number of day and weekly kindergartens. After the adoption of the Education Act in 1948, the internal differentiation of the preschool education system began, creating new types of kindergartens according to the needs and nature of the work and social commitment of parents. Initially, seasonal kindergartens were opened, which by 1958 were already divided into temporary, summer and playgrounds. Along with the restructuring of the system, since the mid-1950s, more attention has been paid to the content of the learning process and its quality. After 1956, preschools performed a new task – **to socialise the child's personality and fully prepare him for school**. At the same time, the necessary actions are being taken to cover more and more children from an early age in the system of public pre-school education.

From the early 1950s to the 1980s, a huge number of young children in the country were covered by the pre-school education system. This does not happen suddenly, but gradually, as statistics show that in the first decade the percentage of children covered by seasonal kindergartens is still too high. By the early 1970s, half-day kindergartens were still larger than full-time ones. The reasons for this can be found both in the lack of adequate building stock and in the insufficient number of qualified children's teachers.

1.3 Professional training and professional qualification of teachers

From 1944 to 1989 a centralised approach was introduced and applied in the training and qualification of teachers in the system of preschool education. The very first Public Education Act of 1948 regulated the requirements for teachers and their qualifications. According to the law, teachers in kindergartens can be: persons who have graduated from the Institute for Teachers; persons who have graduated from pedagogical schools and departments for children's teachers; persons who have passed the one-year pedagogical courses for children's teachers and those who have acquired the rights of regular children's teachers – regular primary school teachers found in kindergartens with pedagogical experience of at least 5 years.

The law restructured some of the institutions for the training of children's teachers. The existing institutes for children's teachers are being transformed into one-year pedagogical courses. Pedagogical schools and departments are secondary schools with a two-year course over IX grade. The future children's teachers are trained in the respective educational institutions by teachers who have completed higher education in pedagogy. For the practical training, regular children's teachers are also appointed after a competitive exam. At the institutions that train children's teachers, the so-called "Exemplary kindergartens" in which future educators conduct practice.

At the end of the 1950s, the term for training children's teachers increased by one year. Future pedagogues are trained in teacher training institutes with a 3-year term above secondary education. In the 1980s, when universities also began to train teachers for the pre-school system, their education was already four years. During the period under review, more attention is paid to the need for employees in kindergartens to acquire the necessary education. The improvement of the qualification is mainly expressed in the provision of guidelines and instructions, as well as in the conduct of various short-term forms, such as seminars, methodological meetings, etc.

The system of pre-school education in the period 1944-1989 developed and functioned in the conditions of the socialist reality, observing the laws and norms of the socialist government. As a result, the original Bulgarian model was changed, which defines the kindergarten as a place with a family character, serving both as a school for parents and as a cultural and community centre. The new standard in the care of young children is largely ideological and politicised. During socialism, the kindergarten became a mass institution, where the individuality of the child was early blurred in the general. The new ideology also redefines the place of young children: they belong to the social order, and the kindergarten must educate them in its future builders. The very idea of pedagogy for the benefit of the child degenerates into the pedagogy of institutionalisation.

But along with the negative phenomena that mark the path of development of the preschool education system during the period under review, there are some positive aspects. The very structuring of this system, the centralization, its recognition as a function of state power and the legal and normative regulation of pedagogical activity can be considered as progress. It is a fact that, despite the serious ideologisation, the pre-school education is gradually oriented towards the scientific achievements in the field of pedagogy and teaching methodology. Especially in the 80's there were attempts to modernise some of its elements. The model of pre-school education established during socialism leaves its mark long after the democratic changes in Bulgaria in the early 1990s.

2. Development of preschool education from the early 1990s to 2016

At the end of 1989, the end of the socialist period, marked by totalitarianism and one-party rule, came, and Bulgaria continued its development as a democratic country. In 1991, a new Constitution was adopted, affirming universal values: freedom, peace, humanism, equality, justice and tolerance, and expressing the public will to build a democratic, legal and social state.

2.1 Legal basis of preschool education in the period 1991-2016

General changes and reorganisation in all spheres of socio-political life also affect education. In 1991, a new Law on Public Education (LPE) was adopted, which regulates the structure, functions and management of the public education system in accordance with the democratic principles of the rule of law. From the adoption of the law until its repeal in 2016, it has undergone changes almost every year due to changes and the introduction of new regulations in the education system, a consequence of changes in socio-political relations in the country after 1989.

According to the LPE, the public education system includes kindergartens, schools and service units. Unlike the period of socialism, when all educational institutions were "people's", i.e. under the management of state and local government, the new law gives the right to disclose both state and municipal and private. The state kindergartens and schools are financed from the state budget, and the municipal ones are supported by the municipal budgets. The private kindergartens are not supported by the budget and are self-financed. All three types of educational institutions are opened by order of the Minister of Education and Science.

In the LPE from 1991 there is a special chapter "Kindergartens", which regulates the functions and activities of preschool institutions. The law stipulates that their scope includes children from 3 years of age until they enter the first grade, and its later amendments establish mandatory pre-school preparation for children over

5 years of age. The functioning of special kindergartens for children with special educational needs or chronic diseases is also envisaged. In accordance with the LPE, preparatory groups¹⁾ can be organised in kindergartens. The law allows such schools to exist as well. Crèche groups for children from 3 months to 3 years old can be found at the all-day and weekly kindergartens. These kindergartens have the status of united kindergartens. In order to specify the requirements for the implementation of the Public Education Act, in the same 1991 **Ordinance N° 5 was issued for kindergartens and joint kindergartens**. It regulates the organisation and management of kindergartens and united kindergartens; the conditions for admitting children to them; the rights and obligations of the **pedagogical, medical, administrative and service staff and** of the parents; the organisation of educational work and medical care. According to the ordinance, each childcare institution should adopt its own rules of procedure, which comply with the regulations. Kindergartens and joint kindergartens are also obliged to develop an annual plan for their activities. The ordinance defines several types of kindergartens and kindergartens: **all-day, half-day, weekly, health²⁾, special and temporary**. The ordinance fixes the scope of the kindergartens – the kindergartens are open for children from 3 to 6 years old³⁾, and the united kindergartens – for children from 10 months to 6 years old. Public governing bodies (board of trustees, parents' council, etc.) can be established at each kindergarten. The desire to restructure the public education system and its orientation towards European and world educational standards necessitate the continuous expansion of the regulatory framework in the education system.

According to the amendments to the Public Education Act of 1998 and beyond, state requirements have been set, which regulate the functions and activities of educational institutions and the bodies for management and control in the public education system. In connection with the amendments to the **Public Education Act** of 1998, in 1999 the **Regulations for the Implementation of the Public Education Act** were adopted, which set out in detail the requirements for the management and organisation of activities in educational institutions, incl. in kindergartens. It defines the types of kindergartens, which are all-day, half-day, weekly, special. The section "Transitional and final provisions" of the Regulations includes a requirement for kindergartens to adopt their own regulations for management and activities, which are in accordance with the laws and regulations.

In connection with state educational requirements, which aim to improve the functioning of the public education system, in **2000 Ordinance N° 4 of 18.09.2000 on pre-school education and training** was adopted. It determines the requirements for the curriculum in the system of preschool education, which should provide achievable knowledge, skills and attitudes for children of preschool age (from 3 to 7 years). The educational content is divided into educational areas, which are in

1) Preparatory groups are groups prepare children for schools according to the low

2) Kindergartens for children with healthy problems – asthmas, heart problems etc.

3) United kindergartens include Crèche groups

accordance with the defined cultural and educational areas according to the Law on the level of education, the general education minimum and the curriculum. According to the Ordinance of 2000 and its additions and amendments in 2005, there are nine educational directions in the system of pre-school education: Bulgarian language and literature, Mathematics, Orientation in the social world, Orientation in nature, Art, Constructive and technical activities, Music and Physical culture.

2.2 Characteristics of preschool education in the period 1991-2016

The political changes that began in the late 1980s are affecting all spheres of society. In education, however, they do not occur so quickly. In the first years after the changes, the system of pre-school education continues to function according to the established model, regardless of the adopted new legal and regulatory framework. This model is gradually beginning to change under the influence of environmental conditions and the needs of society. Opportunities to gain experience and use the achievements of modern pedagogical theory and practice from around the world allow seeking and applying new approaches and forms both in direct pedagogical work and in relation to the management of kindergarten.

According to the Regulations for the implementation of the LPE, kindergartens are defined as preparatory institutions in the public education system, which raise, educate and train children from 3 years of age until they enter the first grade (Article 26, paragraph 1). Together with them, there are united children's institutions with an age range of children from 10 months to 6 years.

Municipal kindergartens are financed from municipal budgets. The management and activity of all kindergartens is controlled by the Regional Inspectorates of Education⁴⁾ (RIE), which are structures at the regional level, administratively subordinated to the Ministry of Education. Along with the control functions, regional inspectorate of education also provides methodological assistance to the pedagogical teams, as well as supports the activities of the management of the kindergartens related to raising the qualification. The educational work, which is carried out by the pedagogical staff, has a priority in the children's establishments. In its planning and implementation, teachers are guided by the programs and guidelines of the Ministry of Education. The legislation already provides an opportunity for more creativity on the part of teachers in pedagogical activity. Teachers themselves assess and select the number and duration of organised activities and forms, content, tools and approaches, stimulating cognitive activity, independence of choice and freedom of action, the richness of imagination and the child's ability to navigate in a dynamically changing environment. As early as the 1991 Ordinance, pedagogical teams were given the right to "develop their own (author's) projects for the organisation of material conditions and pedagogical activities in order to approve

4) Regional Inspectorates of Education (RIE) are departments of Ministry of education and they are located in all regions

original ideas and solutions for the upbringing and development of children when they do not contradict the Act. for public education and the by-laws of the Ministry of National Economy and the Ministry of Health” (Art. 40). Increasingly important place, along with educational work, is given to educational activities.

This trend is reflected in the updated 1998 Public Education Act and well visible in Ordinance N° 4 of 2000. The establishment of state educational requirements for preschool education and training puts on a new level the educational process in kindergarten, orienting it to mastering a fixed minimum of knowledge, skills and attitudes that children must have when entering school. In order to achieve this minimum, training in a preparatory group becomes mandatory.

The differentiation of training in educational areas requires the need to develop a comprehensive program system in which to integrate the curriculum for each of them. Thus, in the first years of the 21st century, the first software systems began to appear, including "Pencil", "Hand for Hand", "Step by Step", as well as many proprietary software systems that teacher teams develop and implement. With the gradual modernization of the preschool education system, the circle of specialists who, together with teachers, participate in the educational process is expanding. Ordinance N° 5 of 1991 regulates the presence of medical workers in children's institutions, and their functions and responsibilities related to the protection of children's health are clearly defined. Chapter three of the ordinance, which defines the requirements for staff, along with the position of "teacher" includes the position of "pedagogue (psychologist)", which "conducts psychodiagnostic activities with children in order to reveal their individual characteristics and capabilities, interests and inclinations, provides support to children in difficult situations and supports teachers, parents and the management of the kindergarten” (Article 46). At the beginning of the 21st century, the issue of integrating children and students with special educational needs (SEN) into the educational environment is becoming increasingly important. The so-called special kindergartens in which only children with special educational needs are educated and trained, but together with them such children are already accepted in the municipal kindergartens. In implementation of the integration policies for children with special educational needs since 2003, the laws and regulations in the preschool education system have been updated. According to the new regulations, kindergartens are obliged to provide a supportive environment for integrated education and upbringing of children with special educational needs and / or chronic diseases. Complex pedagogical assessment teams have been established at the Regional Inspectorates of Education, whose functions include providing methodological assistance, coordination and control of the teams in the kindergartens in which children with SEN are integrated. It is also planned to open Resource Centres with teams of special pedagogues, speech therapists, psychologists, etc., which will also support teachers in integrated learning. A regulation has been adopted on the maximum number of children with SEN in a group – up to two.

The facts presented for the period 1991-2016 show that, albeit slowly, in the field of preschool education, processes of modernisation are beginning to take place, which will later lay the foundations of the model we know today. Gradually, pedagogical activities require approaches that correspond to modern understandings of education, development and socialisation of the child's personality. The policies in the field of pre-school education themselves provide greater decentralisation, respectively compliance with the regional context and individual needs in the provision of care, education and training of preschool children. Kindergarten education and training are increasingly based on methodological foundations in line with modern scientific achievements and world experience in the field of child development. The state policy is aimed at creating conditions for inclusion of more children in the system of pre-school education with a view to better preparation for school. Modernization, which began in the early 1990s, has naturally contributed to the development of the pre-school education system, leading to qualitative changes in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century that build its modern look.

2.3 Professional training and professional qualification of teachers

The desire to improve the quality of education in kindergartens during the period under review increasingly affects the qualifications of teachers. State standards for the training of teachers in the system of pre-school education are being approved and the legal framework regulating the requirements for their professional competence is constantly being improved.

In 1994 **Instruction N° 2 of 29.07.1994** was issued on the requirements for holding the position of "teacher" according to the acquired education, professional qualification and legal capacity, which was supplemented and updated several times, most recently in 2003. The instruction describes the requirements for the qualification for the position of "teacher" in kindergarten.

Additional requirements are specified in connection with the appointment to the position in a special kindergarten. With the adoption of **Ordinance N° 5 of the Ministry of Education and Science of 29.12.1996 on the conditions for raising the qualification of pedagogical staff** in the system of public education and the procedure for acquiring professional qualification degrees, the requirement for teachers is regulated, incl. and in kindergartens, for participation in various forms of professional development. At the same time, they are given the opportunity to acquire a professional qualification degree, which validates the respective higher level of qualification, respectively of professional competence.

In 1997, a decree of the Council of Ministers adopted an **Ordinance on the uniform state requirements for acquiring the professional qualification "teacher"**. It

specifies the requirements for compulsory subjects, the number of practical training and unifies the way of conducting state exams for all specialties in universities that train teachers, incl. and children's teachers. It explicitly states that the professional qualification "teacher" can be acquired in higher education institutions that comply with the Higher Education Act. The ordinance is in force until the end of 2016. Regarding the term of preparation of children's teachers, the norms from the previous period are still in force. Children's teachers can be both graduates of three years with a term of study ("specialist", "professional bachelor" after 2007) and four years of study ("bachelor"). The requirement is that the conditions of the Ordinance for acquiring the professional qualification "teacher" are met.

The amendments to the **Regulations for the Implementation of the Public Education Act** of 2009 pay special attention to the career development of pedagogues. *"Career development is a process of improving competencies by successively occupying teaching or educational positions in order to increase the quality and efficiency of the educational process."* (Art. 123a). In the coming years, raising the qualification of teachers in kindergartens has become one of the priority activities for management. It is related to the requirement for educators to upgrade and expand their competencies in accordance with the dynamically changing conditions and expectations of them. It is implemented both through the opportunities for raising the professional qualification degree and through various national qualification programs. At this stage, however, it is not yet regulated as a mandatory requirement for teachers.

3. Characteristics of preschool education in the period from 2016 till today

In August 2016, the Preschool and Education Act was adopted which is associated with many expectations for making significant changes in the system of our education system. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the education process in kindergartens. Kindergartens may include Crèche groups for children from 10 months to 3 years of age. These groups are under the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education and Science. If there is a lack of Crèche groups in the relevant municipality and if there are available places, children may start kindergarten at 2 years of age. The final 2 years of preschool education (for children aged 5–7 years) have been compulsory since 2010, and children may attend either kindergartens or primary schools. Compulsory pre-primary education will apply to all 4-year-olds from 2023/2024 (amendment to Article 8 of the Preschool and School Education Act of 18 September 2020). Schools can provide compulsory preschool education for children aged 4 years only when the municipality does not have a kindergarten. Compulsory preschool education in state and municipal kindergartens is provided free of charge. In terms of Art. 35. (1) the kindergartens are municipal or private. The Mayors are employers of the kindergarten directors. The position "Kindergarten director" re-

sponds to the necessity of the provision of education in the educational policy of pre-school education. The kindergarten director must have a higher education in the specialty "Preschool pedagogy" at the educational qualification degree "bachelor" or "master" and teaching experience. The director must have pedagogical experience at least 5 years according to Article 213, paragraph 2 of Preschool and School Education Law and Article 19, paragraphs 1 and 2 of Ordinance on pensions and length of service. The activity areas: administrative and managerial, organisational, coordinating and control, educational, health and sanitary-hygienic, social and humanitarian and financial. The position of "teacher" shall be held by persons who, in addition to the higher education and professional qualifications required for the position, are defined in accordance with Annex N° 1 – higher education in the specialty "Preschool pedagogy" at the educational qualification degree "bachelor" or "master". The position of "senior teacher" shall be held by persons who, in addition to the higher education and professional qualifications required for the position, are defined in accordance with Annex N° 1 – higher education in the specialty "Preschool pedagogy" at the educational qualification degree "bachelor" or "master" and teaching experience. That position must include the following: to hold the position of "teacher", to have not less than the obligatory qualification credits for each passed period of attestation under art. 49, para. 5, have acquired a fifth or fourth professional qualification degree, to have 10 years of teaching experience. The teacher-mentor has to have higher education in the specialty "Preschool pedagogy" at the educational qualification degree "bachelor" or "master" and teaching experience. He/she has to do practical training of the "trainee teacher" by: present the annual thematic distribution by educational directions, shows different types of pedagogical situations, consult and participate in the planning, development of the pedagogical situation, observing the observance of the program system, assisting in the formulation of the goals, the choice of methods and techniques of teaching, approving them and assisting in their implementation, acquaints the trainee teacher with the characteristics of the groups in which he /she will independently conduct an educational process and supports his / her adaptation. A teacher's assistant as a member of non-pedagogical staff is provided for more than 3 children or students with special educational needs in a kindergarten group, when the children have complex needs as a result of emotional-behavioural problems with autism spectrum disorder or with another disability, disorder or illness. The teacher's assistant carries out his activities according to the instructions of the teachers and has the following functions: Provides technical assistance in the preparation of educational materials for the children in the group; supports the work of teachers to develop children's adaptive abilities to the educational environment and to achieve their independence; supports the movement of children in the kindergarten building; supports the provision of safe conditions for children's education by supporting the teacher in ensuring order in the group in case of problematic behaviour of a child; supports the mastering of hygiene habits and self-care of children in kindergarten; 6. works with parents to explain and implement the project activities; participates in information and motivational campaigns; carries out other activities assigned by the director.

The law operates without its implementing rules, therefore it is detailed and concrete with the definition of the basic terms. Education is defined as a process that involves learning, education and socialisation. Education is a national priority and is implemented in accordance with the principles of a unified state educational policy to ensure the right to preschool and school education; focus on the interest and motivation of the child, the age and social changes in his life. As well as his/her ability to apply the acquired skills in practice; equal access to quality education and inclusion of each child and each student; equality and non-discrimination in the conduct of preschool and school education; preservation and development of the Bulgarian educational tradition. As well innovation and efficiency in pedagogical practices and in the organisation of the educational process; transparency of governance and predictability of the development of preschool and school education; autonomy for educational policies, self-government and decentralisation; government engagement of the state, municipalities and non-profit legal entities, employers, parents and other stakeholders and dialogue between them on education. The preschool education process is subject to the implementation of a programmatic system as part of the strategy for the development of the preschools. The preschool education process should be provided in 6 different types of preschool institutions which during the past 6 years are different as a number. It is visible that in the last 3 years Weekly and Healthy are close because of the new policy connected implementation of the inclusive education documents. At the same time the number of children visiting private preschools is increasing.

The Programming System is a comprehensive concept of child development with an approach and forms of pedagogical interaction subject to a common goal and creating conditions for the overall development of the child's personality and the acquisition of a set of competencies, knowledge, skills and relationships necessary for the successful passage of the child to school education. A new point in the Law is the definition of quality management as a continuous process of organisational development, based on analysing, planning, implementing the activities, assessing and making improvements in the work of preschools and schools. The evaluation is done through self-assessment and inspection. Self-assessment is aimed at making an internal assessment of the quality of education provided through activities, procedures and criteria defined by the preschool or school. Inspection is part of the quality management process based on analysing, planning, implementing activities, assessing and making improvements to the work of preschools and schools.

4. Description of the Crèche structure

The activity of nurseries in Bulgaria is currently regulated in Ordinance No. 26 of 18.11.2008 on the organisation and activity of nurseries and children's kitchens and the health requirements for them, which is periodically updated. Nurseries are organizationally separate structures in which priority is given to protecting and

strengthening the health of children from 3 months to 3 years of age. Therefore, they are in the structure of health and health care. The main staff consists of specialists with medical education (nurse, midwife, medical assistant, and paramedic). The qualified staff is supplemented by a teacher. Their employer is the Mayor of the municipality. Medical specialists lead the overall work in the nursery groups. Their main functions are regulated in the regulation and refer to: daily monitoring of children's health; conducting organised activities for the children in the group together with the teacher; application of an individual approach to each child and active care for the adaptation of each newly admitted child to the nursery; periodically monitor the mental development of the children, assisted by the teacher. Medical specialists in nurseries should have a completed "Bachelor's"/"Professional Bachelor's" degree in the specialties of "Nurse", "Midwife", "Medical Assistant", and "Paramedic". According to the regulations, they should periodically undergo training on the problems of early child development, prevention and promotion of health and first medical aid, and also increase their professional qualification through continuing medical training. A pedagogue must be appointed in every nursery school. His main duties are related to: organising and conducting the overall educational and training work with the children; provision of appropriate materials for children's play and education; provision of didactic aids for activities and games; preparation of an individual adaptation plan for each newly admitted child in the nursery; development of plans for educational and training work; participation in the systematic monitoring of children's mental development. The pedagogue should have a completed educational qualification "Bachelor" in Preschool Pedagogy. He periodically undergoes training on topics from the field of early childhood development, complex health promotion and first aid, and he is also expected to increase his pedagogical qualification. The direct care of the children in connection with the maintenance of personal hygiene is carried out by babysitters who are part of the unqualified staff. According to Ordinance No. 26 of 18.11.2008, nurseries are permanent (without interruption throughout the year) and seasonal (for a period of 4-6 months). In turn, permanent crèches are divided into day (daily stay), weekly (stay within the working week) and mixed (day crèches in which there are also weekly crèche groups). Seasonal crèches are day only. Nursery groups can also be found in full-day and weekly kindergartens, and the organisation of work in them does not differ from that of permanent nurseries.

5. The 4 most important new legal provisions

1. Education is defined as a national priority by:

A new understanding of educational standards with emphasis on the achievement of objectives and results – a set of mandatory performance requirements in the system of preschool and school education, as well as the conditions and processes for their achievement, the national qualifications framework and its at-

tachment to the competences that children and pupils should acquire in preschool and school (this is lacking in the current model of education). Redefining types of school preparation – general, extended, supplementary, profiled, professional, specialised, the regulation of inclusive education as an integral part of the right to education – a process of awareness, acceptance and support for the individuality of each child. Diversity of needs of all children and students by activating and including resources aimed at eliminating the obstacles to learning. Creation of opportunities for the development and participation of children and pupils in all aspects of community life – every child and every student is important, the consistent implementation of the policy of preserving and strengthening the role of the state in financing preschool education and changing public perceptions about it. For part of the social services system, we are already talking about pre-primary education, thus leading to the educational priorities of preschool childhood.

2. Centres for the support of personal development are created:

The aim is to develop and implement and to integrate childcare and schooling, to ensure the activities, services and programs with care for the development of the interests and abilities of the children in the community. Personal development support centres and specialised service units cover existing service units in the system. The law provides for resource centres and auxiliary preschools and schools to be transformed into regional centres supporting inclusive education, and auxiliary schools to be transformed into centres for special educational support. An important step is to move the centres for support of personal development to the municipalities, to tie their activity with the regional and municipal community service strategy and to integrate them with the other spheres such as health and social.

3. A modern framework for the qualification and career development of preschool teachers was established:

The improvement of the qualification is a continuous process of improving and enriching the competencies of pedagogical specialists for effective implementation of the requirements of the work performed and for career development. The planning, coordination, management and control of the activities for raising the qualification of the pedagogical one's specialists are trained at national, regional, municipal and school level. The pedagogical specialists shall be obliged to increase annually their qualifications in order to improve the quality of their work and improve the results and quality of children's training and students. Improving the qualification of pedagogical specialists is measured by a system of qualifications credits and is certified by a document. The system of qualification credits is determined by the state educational standard for the status and the professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialists. The directors of kindergartens, schools and centres for support for personal development are required to provide the necessary conditions for raising the qualification of the

pedagogical ones specialists The purpose of the new law is to bring our legislation more fully into line with the requirement to increase the qualification of pedagogical specialists by introducing: compulsory qualification (48 academic hours for the appraisal period), which is measured by a system of qualification credits (1 credit = 16 academic hours, half of which are attended) and certified by a document; compulsory internal institutional qualification = 16 academic hours; 4 years attestation as a process of assessing the compliance of pedagogical specialists and directors with their professional profile and learning outcomes as well as the strategy for the development of preschool and school; an information register of the approved programs for improving the qualification of the pedagogical specialists; the providers of qualification services for pedagogical specialists are entitled to register their programs; career development besides teachers and educators and other pedagogical specialists – directors, psychologists, speech therapists, etc., by awarding degrees: second and first; trainee-teacher and mentor-teacher. Career development is a process of improving competences in the successive performance of teaching positions or in the acquisition of degrees for the purpose of improving the quality and efficiency of education. Teaching positions are as follows: teacher, senior teacher, and chief teacher.

Based on the achieved level of qualification teaching professionals can acquire these professional degrees: fifth, fourth, third, second, and first professional degree.

The training of pedagogical specialists associated with the rise training for acquiring professional qualification degrees is performed in the higher education system of higher schools established under the Law on Higher Education. The teaching service, qualifications credits, the professional qualification degree and the appraisal results shall provide grounds for the career development of educationalists for adults. A greater number of qualification credits and a higher professional qualification degree shall provide grounds for a faster career development of educationalists, regardless of the duration of their teaching service. The appraisal of teachers, directors and head teachers and the other educationalists shall be carried out every four years by an appraisal committee appointed by the employer in consultation with the teaching staff meeting. Educationalists shall be incentivized with moral and materials rewards for excellence.

The Minister of Education and Science and the head of the relevant regional division of education may issue orders to introduce rewards for educationalists at the national and regional level. Educationalists may be conferred awards and distinctions for exemplary discharge of their duties upon an order issued by their employer.

4. Modern and democratic rules of the management of preschool educational institutions are envisaged:

Preschool education sets the foundation for lifelong learning by providing the physical, cognitive, linguistic, spiritual-moral, social, emotional and creative development of children, taking into account the importance of the game in the process of pedagogical interaction. The preschool education process shall be subject to the implementation of a programmatic system as part of the development strategy of the preschool, respectively of the school, which shall be adopted by a decision of the Pedagogical Council. The program system is a complete concept of the child's development with approaches and forms of pedagogical interaction, subordinate to a common goal.

The **Programming System** shall meet the following requirements: to create conditions for the acquisition of competencies in each of the educational fields under Art. 28, para. 2; to take into account the specifics of the preschool or school and of the groups; to match the interests, opportunities and age characteristics of children.

In the program system shall be included: approaches and forms of pedagogical interaction; distribution of forms of pedagogical interaction; thematic distribution for each age group; and the mechanism of interaction between the participants in preschool education.

With the entry into force of the new Law on Preschool and School Education Ordinance N° 4 of 2000 and 2005 is repealed **by Ordinance N° 5 of 2016 on Preschool Education**, which defines the State Educational Standards (DOS) and defines “aggregate of requirements for learning outcomes. In Art. 2 it is said that pre-school education is carried out in kindergartens, and compulsory pre-school education – also from schools. According to Art. 8. the pre-school education shall be organised in age groups, as follows: first age group – 3- 4-year old, and in the cases of art. 4, para.2, 2 – 4 years old; second age group – 4- 5years old; (amend. SG 85/20, in force from 02.10.2020) third age group – 5- 6-years old; amend. SG 85/20, in force from 02.10.2020) fourth age group – 6 – 7-years old.

In case of an **emergency epidemic situation**, when the present educational process in the kindergarten or school is not stopped, in the presence of a registered 14-day morbidity of over 250 per 100,000 people in the respective area, children enrolled in compulsory preschool education may be absent after parent-written notification to the principal.

The pedagogical interaction at a **distance in an electronic environment** shall support the acquisition of the competencies under Art. 28, para. 2, the resources used to be selected by the pedagogical specialists in accordance with the age of the children. (4) (Renumbered from Paragraph 3, amended, SG No. 12, effective

from 11.02.2022) The duration of the pedagogical interaction with a child from a distance in an electronic environment shall be determined by the pedagogical specialists in accordance with the age of the children, but may not exceed 30 minutes per day.

By Decision N° 188 of the Council of Ministers of March 5, 2021, the following national programs were adopted:

National Program "Providing a modern educational environment", whose main objectives aimed at early childhood are: providing conditions for equal access to preschool and school education and improving the quality of the educational process and providing training in road safety by providing on outdoor and indoor playgrounds (mobile areas) in kindergartens and schools in order to reduce accidents with children and students on the roads.

National Program "We succeed together": After the regulation of the possibility for preschool children to work with the support of their parents from a distance in an electronic environment, it became necessary to support kindergartens and schools where compulsory preschool education is provided in two directions.: to share innovative practices for conducting activities with children and families inside and outside the kindergarten / school and to promote children's physical activity. This program also aims to build a family community within the kindergarten, build a supportive, receptive, safe, multicultural, interactive environment, develop and implement effective measures to ensure a smooth transition of the child from the family environment to kindergarten.

National Program "Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the system of preschool and school education" 2021 includes institutions from the system of preschool education. Modern e-learning methods will be integrated, while emphasising the training of pedagogical specialists to search for and present appropriate content in the respective age group.

The National Program "Together for Every Child" this year is focused on increasing the scope of children included in preschool education, and the need for this is significantly strengthened by the amendments to the Preschool and School Education Act from 2020 compulsory pre-school education also for children over 4 years of age.

National Program "Support to Municipalities for Implementation of Activities for Educational Desegregation and Prevention for Non-admission of Secondary Segregation" has the general goal of providing municipalities with equal access to quality education for children in compulsory preschool education and students attending segregated educational institutions by implementing activities for educational desegregation and prevention to secondary segregation. The specific objectives related to the implementation of activities to provide an educational

environment that encourages mutual communication between children in compulsory preschool education, students, parents and teachers, providing free transport for children in compulsory preschool education and for students attending segregated educational institutions, for training, education and socialisation in non-segregated educational institutions and providing free teaching aids and materials or electronic devices for distance learning.

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PARADIGM SHIFTS OF TRAINING AND PRACTICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN HUNGARY BETWEEN 1945-2022

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1. Historical overview of educational policy and ECEC teacher training in Hungary between 1945 and 1989

After the Second World War Hungary became a part of the Soviet occupation zone. The suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 the country remained a communist country until the Soviet Union weakened at the end of the 1980's and the Eastern bloc disintegrated. In 1948 the first fundamental step of the communist regime was the monopolisation of authority over basic education. This led to the nationalisation of all primary schools. Legal regulation and the control mechanisms of finance became an exclusive right of the public sphere (Kelemen, 2003). Teachers were also expected to conform to the communist regime and were strictly ideologised by the communist party. However the academic representatives of educational sciences also presented a wide range of theoretical and practical issues in education, also presenting the 'ideal' personality of teachers. In 1949 the book of *The Issues of New Education* was written by László Faragó and Árpád Kiss. Their conception was based upon not only the actual political canon but also the fundamental paradigm of the reform pedagogy that was applied in Hungarian schools in the 1920's years.

According to the 'The Issues of New Education' the ideal teacher is a social being, who also defines himself/herself as a political entity, ideologically determined by Marxism-Leninism. A consummate autonomous moral person, who is responsible for the children and knows the individual characteristics of each child. A new expectation was also defined: the teacher's personality should be 'open and unfinished'. The need for permanent professional development is essential for the teachers. The importance of care and *caritas* for children was emphasised. Teachers must respect freedom and individuals and are also characterised by self-control, wisdom, knowledge, and flexibility. Teachers are able to find adequate educational methods in appropriate situations, support children, not striving to shape the child in his own image and lead them to human culture and social values (Faragó & Kiss, 1949). The duality of ideological and scientific approach characterised the philosophy of the book that was shortly banned by the regime.

In 1950 a new political system was introduced, the so-called 'council system', which officially differentiated several sub-national levels (with 19 county-, 140 district- and some 3000 local-level councils in cities, towns and villages), but these had no local autonomy (Gyuris, 2014). Similarly, participation of the churches in education was annihilated. Parochial schools were nationalised, with the exception of fifteen secondary grammar schools (Romsics 2010). Nationalisation caused a fundamental shift in educational decision-making: all functions were delegated to the national level, while lower levels and non-governmental organisations lost their authority. The communist supremacy in public education became absolute until 1953. After the death of Stalin, power relations in the communist party in Hungary slightly rearranged, which caused some moderate 'adjustment' in social as well as economic issues, concerning basic education as well. Political tensions were rapidly increasing and resulted in the outbreak of the revolution in 1956 (Romsics 2010). Despite the suppression of the 'Hungarian dream', this period put an end to the first phase of post-war communism in Hungary.

In November 1956, officials from the Ministry of Education published a draft that could be interpreted as the first step in a comprehensive reform. The textbooks of primary and lower and upper secondary schools were extracted, parts of the books on literature and geography related to the Soviet Union were omitted, compulsory education in the Russian language was abolished, and free religious education was allowed. After the fall of the revolution, these measures were revoked, and ministry officials required that school-education work be conducted in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism. In July 1958, the cultural policy guidelines of the Hungarian Socialist Party were published. The document proclaimed that the educational institutions have a major role in '*suppressing and destroying the bourgeois perspective on life, thinking, morality*' and have been entrusted to shape the consciousness and behaviour of young people. In terms of teacher training the former upper secondary teacher training institutes were abolished in 1959 and tertiary institutes were opened in different parts of the country.¹⁾

1) In Budapest, Győr, Esztergom, Szeged, Debrecen, Jászberény, Baja, Kaposvár, Sárospatak, Szombathely and Nyíregyháza.

In the 1960's, communism was re-established and the actual governor, János Kádár was no Stalinist, therefore from the 1960's the 'soft dictatorship' had begun. This opened the way to create new circumstances for education. The new education law in 1961 – the first one since the Communist turn in 1948 – increased the quality of education, and adapted it to 'real life' by decreasing the politically influenced knowledge in curricula (Kelemen, 2003). The political control of teachers was reduced, but not banned.

In the second half of the 1960's the development of the principles of the new education policy began. A broader range of experts has already been involved in this work: economists and sociologists have worked together to develop the content of the new reform. In these years, the first modern studies of social stratification were carried out, which showed that the development of the Hungarian school system continues to contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities. It is also due to this that the need to develop the compensatory function of public education, which reduces the disadvantages of origin, has become more and more emphasised in the public opinion. Thus, representatives of the profession (teachers and social scientists) also took part in elaborating on the new reform, but in the final stage of the work, expertise was suppressed by the propagandistic voices of the communist party.

From the end of the 1960's didactic research in the field of teaching and learning became more widespread. Various forms of audio-visual media and programmed education appeared. School experiments were launched to reshape the structure and content work of the school. The first started in 1969 in Szentlőrinc, under the direction of László Gáspár.²⁾

The next prescriptive curriculum of 1978 was made by consideration of global planning, the internal differentiation of teaching materials, and the solid acceptance of differences between individual schools (Báthory, 2001). Significant change and different social demands occurred, since the previous uniformed school structure became quite varied. The monopoly of the eight-year primary and lower secondary school (from age 6 to 14) ended, and a great number of lower and upper secondary schools started to offer 6- or 8-year education (Halász & Lannert, 2003).

The 1985 Act of Education was the last significant public education policy document of the socialist era. It listed the rights and responsibilities of pupils, students, teachers and parents, and defined the institutions of kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary education. It dealt with adult education, primary arts education, student dormitories and international relations, and placed emphasis on strengthening the relationship between the school and the social environment. It listed

2) The work was approved by the Ministry of Culture in 1969, and the institute was declared an experimental school in 1971. The Szentlőrinc experiment sought to transform the content of traditional school education and the framework of its organisations in several respects: the unit of production and management, the management of public affairs and leisure activities. Since 1990, the institute has been considered an alternative school.

school setting and school maintenance as state law, but gave some schools more autonomy. Moreover, it allowed the '*application of individual methodical innovation*' and the continuation of school experiments in a narrowly defined circle. As a result, the autonomy of schools increased in the late 1980's choosing alternative and progressive pedagogical programs.³⁾ (Halász & Lannert, 2003).

The year 1989 brought the end of socialism. The political and social transformation of 1989-1990 caused a powerful impulse to the abolishment of the monopoly of the state, to the democratisation, and modernisation of the education and training systems. The transition years were not only the times of political changes but also the beginning of the move from a planned economy to a market economy. Decentralisation (establishing a system of local governments and dividing responsibilities and authority) took place during the transition years. The responsibility for service provision was placed with the county and local authorities, within the national, county, and local level. Education had to give adequate answers to the challenges arising from the developing new political, economic and social conditions.

The 1993 Act on Public Education enforced freedom including the right of founding a school by a church, or a legal entity and by a person, as well as the free choice of school by the parents. It strictly prohibited all forms of discrimination. The changes also significantly impacted educational content, too. Requirements related to socialist ideology and education were removed from various curriculum documents. The appearance in content of a variety of values and perspectives became acceptable. The 1995 National Core Curriculum expanded the scope of professional decision-making at institutional level in the area of regulating content. Locally created pedagogical programs, curricula and textbooks became the fundamental documents of schools' pedagogical work (Fischer-Dárdai, Á. – Kaposi, J., 2021). It was a substantial step towards the overall modernisation of the content and methodology of public education.

3) Alternative Economics High School, founded in 1988 in Budapest and the Waldorf Kindergarten in Solymár, established by parents in 1989.

2. The history of ECEC and teacher training in Hungary

The history of nurseries and kindergartens date back to the early 19th century in Hungary. The first Hungarian kindergarten was established by Countess Teréz Brunszvik in Buda in 1828 to educate and support children of poor families. The main profile was developing cognitive skills and emotions by building relationships, setting good examples and singing. The first nursery (also called crèche) was opened in Pest in 1852 to look after children of poor workers. The task was to nurse and care for the infants and to contribute to the improvement of family life in this way. Working mothers could leave their child in the nursery early in the morning, where children were bathed and checked by a doctor. During the day they were given meals and could play under the supervision of adults.

Through the first half of the 19th century kindergartens were operated as pre-school institutions with a strong emphasis on education with only a secondary emphasis on play. By 1938 more than a quarter of 3-6 years old children were in kindergarten. After the Second World War the development of nurseries also came under state control. The right of women to motherhood and the survival of the nation had to be ensured by enacting the law on women's equality, education and the right to work, therefore the state had to take over part of the care and education of children. Factories and councils began to build hundreds of nurseries, since they were overcrowded, lacked basic health conditions, and had deficiencies in equipment and education. Professional work was more focused on 'baby-sitting' (Sztrinkóné, 2009).

The year 1953 was very important in the history of Hungarian early childhood education, since a law was enacted that assigned kindergarten as an institution that prepares children for school education. However kindergartens were defined as a part of public education. Methodological Guidelines were published in 1953, confirming the professionalisation of kindergarten teachers. The Guidelines defined compulsory classes as the primary form of teaching children. Kindergarten teachers also had to deal with the expectations of the current politics in kindergarten. Children had to recognize the photos of Lenin, Stalin, and Rákosi Mátyás, characterising them as the most decisive leaders *'who love children very much'* (Molnár et. al., 2015).

The book entitled 'Educational Work in the Kindergarten' (also called 'Handbook') was published in 1957. It summarised 10-year-experience of the socialist pedagogical practice and reflected to the mild atmosphere of Khrushchev's times⁴⁾. A progressive element of the document was facilitating kindergarten teachers to take

4) Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev (1894-1971) was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1953 to 1964 and chairman of that country's Council of Ministers from 1958 to 1964.

attention on the special needs of 3-6 year olds by 'planned management' of kindergarten life, tools and activities to ensure the development of young children. The Handbook also declared the pedagogical content and the methodological way that needed to be offered in each kindergarten. Teachers had to observe young children and develop their skills and support their behaviour for school learning. Preparing for the school function of kindergartens was evident, defining this approach for decades.

The next document regulating Hungarian kindergarten pedagogy was the Kindergarten Education Program. The approach definitely changed: *'The goal of pre-school education is an integral part of the unified socialist education system. It aims to promote the versatile, harmonious development of children aged 3-6.'* (Preschool Education Program 1971, p. 9). Despite the mandatory socialist adjective, this document focused on the development of children's individual personality. Due to recognizing the peculiarities of age, child-centred forms of learning had been introduced e.g. activity and play-based learning. This programme was the first milestone of re-thinking the goals, the professional image and child-centred practice of Hungarian kindergartens.⁵⁾

The need for college-level training for kindergarten teachers was articulated in 1936 and in 1948. After 1945, the mass employment of women resulted in an increase in the demand for pre-school education, which also determined the rapid development of pre-school education. In 1949, in addition to the three-year training that culminated in a qualifying examination, one-year training began, based on high school graduation. A relatively large number of unqualified kindergarten teachers were trained in part-time training programmes.

Substantial expansion of kindergartens followed during the late 1950's through the 1980's. By 1965 the number of children attending kindergarten had doubled with a total of 3227 kindergartens in operation. In the 1970's, the generalisation of pre-school education resulted in a shortage of the active kindergarten teachers. The number of part-time students strongly increased and vocational secondary school training re-started. By 1975, two thirds of children were in kindergarten, and this figure increased to 92% for 5-year-olds by 1985.

The 1985 Act on Education raised the kindergarten teacher training to the college level for a period of 3 years. Recently, early childhood teacher training programs are offered by the universities on the level of bachelor's degree (3 years), both through full and part-time programs.

With the transition to democratic government after 1989, kindergarten operation and responsibility shifted to the local governments and most kindergartens operated

5) In 1970 the National Institute of Nurseries was established to develop educational, methodological work and teacher training. The training programmes of nurses began in the year of 1978.

formerly by industry were closed. In the 1993 Act on Public Education kindergarten was recognized as an official part of the education system and was given the same status as elementary and secondary education in Hungary. Attendance at kindergarten was made compulsory for all children beginning in the fall of the calendar year in which they become 5 years of age. From 2015 the attendance at kindergarten has been made compulsory from the age of 3.

3. The current system of early childhood education and care in Hungary

In Hungary, the system of early childhood education and care is bisectorial. The first stage lasts for 0-3 years of age (nursery, ISCED level 010) the second stage from the age of 3 to the age of schooling (kindergarten, ISCED level 020). The institutional system of both areas is managed by the Ministry of Human Capacities, but different state secretariats share its responsibility. Nurseries are under control of social sector (State Secretariat for Social Affairs and Social Inclusion) while kindergartens are under control of educational sector (State Secretariat for Education).⁶

3.1 Nurseries

The daytime care for children under the age of 3 is done in nurseries. The nursery is an institution providing care and education for children from 20 weeks to 3 years of age. If the child has reached the 3rd year of age but not yet achieved the necessary level of physical or mental development, he/she can stay in a nursery until he/she is 4 years old. The nursery may also provide the care of children with special educational needs and also, of children entitled to early development and care, up to the age of six. In addition to basic care, the nursery can help families with special counselling, periodic childcare, a children's hotel or other child rearing services (for example, parent-child playgroup, games and equipment rental for families). These services can be used until the child's sixth year of age.

Nursery care can be organised in „mini nurseries”, „workplace nurseries”, and „family nurseries”. All three forms of care are based on the nationwide basic program of nursery care and the staff have qualifications. Mini nurseries provide professional care in a range of smaller groups (up to seven children/groups), in simpler personal, physical and operational conditions. "Workplace nurseries" primarily provide care of the children for parents engaged in occupational activity at the employer. The "family nursery" is a service accommodated in the home of the provider.

The kindergarten provides institutional full-day care for 3-6-year-old children. Participation in kindergarten care is obligatory for children of three years of age

6) https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/index_en.php_en [Online: 2022. 02. 15.]

(according to law, the child must go to kindergarten from the first of September of the year, when he reached the age of 3 until August 31st). The children attend at least 4 hours a day in kindergarten, but in case of a request of the parent, the local registrar (for ecclesiastical and private institutions, the maintainer) may give exemption for the child from compulsory participation until the age of five. This can be justified by family circumstances, the development of the child's abilities, and his/her particular situation. The permit can be issued with the consent of the senior kindergarten teacher and the health visitor.

3.1.1 Admission requirements

Children between 20 weeks and three years may be admitted by crèches or up to five years if the child is disabled. With the consent of the parent the district nurse, family paediatrician or family doctor, social worker or family worker, child welfare agency, court of guardians may also initiate the admission of the child by the crèche.

Upon enrolment, parents have to provide a certificate issued by the family paediatrician or family doctor on the fact that the health condition of the child makes it possible to attend a crèche. Where there is no room for the child, nurseries are clarifying the enrolment. Priority is given on a social basis to those parents, who enrol their children into nurseries. Others require an employer's certificate (a letter of intent from an employer) to enrol their child. With this system the institutions can take the needs for social care and the need for employment into account. If the child is over 3 but based on his physical or mental development she/ he is not suitable for kindergarten education and the physician of the nursery does not recommend his enrolment to kindergarten, he may stay in crèche till 31 August following his fourth birthday. In addition, the specialist giving help to the rehabilitation of the child with special needs may also initiate the admission of the child if the crèche is able to provide early intervention for the child concerned. A child with special needs can be enrolled until the age of five.

There is a detailed and strict regulation concerning children with disabilities. The enrolment of a disabled child to a special nursery group possible if the expert committee provides an official opinion (according to the provisions of the Act on the Public Education) and proposes early admission to the nursery. The expert opinion will be reviewed until the early childhood development and care is given to the child. Children with disabilities can also be included in kindergartens where the conditions for early development are given. Early development between 0 and 3 years is at least weekly, up to four hours a week. In addition to the nursery care services, children's hotel offers up to twenty-four hours of care for a child whose parents cannot take care of his / her temporary. The service may also be provided on a weekend and on a holiday, but the duration may not exceed ten days per an educational year.

Child day care services can be organised for non-educational purposes in the day-time care of children. Therefore care, education, catering and employment can be offered especially for children who do not receive nursery care. This service may be provided after short-term training for children whose parents (legal representatives) are unable to provide day-care for their children because of work, full time education, training, illness or other reasons.

3.1.2 Age levels and grouping of children

The crèche primarily undertakes the daytime supervision and professional care of children under 3, with the objective of promoting the harmonious physical and mental development of the children taking their age and individual needs into account. One nursery group consists of a maximum of 12 children. However, if all the children are over 2, a maximum of 14 children may be cared for in one group. Up to seven children in the "mini nursery" and "work nursery" and five children in the "family nursery" can be brought up in one group.

If the nursery group also includes a child with special educational needs, a maximum of 10, if it includes two children with special needs, 8 children can be brought together. While in a group caring for 3-6 children with special needs, the maximum number of the children to be developed and cared for is 6. However, adjusting to the needs of these children, the number of children to be educated could be set in a lower amount. In special crèche groups providing care to children with disability, one caregiver can look after up to 3 children, in case of a family nursery, up to 2 children. The organisation of care in crèches follows the principle of personal stability; a part of a group of children (approx. 5–6 children) belongs to the same caregiver. It is a professional standard to let the child attend the same group for the entire duration spending the crèche. There are both homogenous and mixed aged groups in crèches. From a professional point of view, same-age groups are more beneficial.

3.1.3 Organisation of time, days and weeks

According to law, the crèche is open for at least 10 hours a day. The opening hours of the crèche are specified by the maintainer taking into consideration the working hours of the parents. According to the relevant law, children obtain care in crèches for a minimum of four hours and a maximum of twelve. The educational year in nursery – as well as in school and kindergarten – starts on September 1 and ends on August 31st. The provider defines the duration of the summer holiday (when the crèche is closed), which can be of maximum of 5 weeks, but institutions typically only close for 2 or 3 weeks in the summer. In larger settlements, institutions take turns in closing, so there is always at least one crèche open throughout the summer.

In order to ensure a gradual introduction to crèche, the mother can stay with the child in the crèche for a period of time (usually two weeks) to allow the child to get used to the environment. During this period, the time spent in crèche continuously grows and the time spent there by the mother decreases. The daily routine in crèches is continuous and flexible in order to meet the needs of children and provide safety, reliability as well as opportunities for being active and learning to be independent. The daily schedule of crèches depends on the age, development level and needs of children in the groups but it is also influenced by the weather and the number of children in a group. A further aspect is ensuring emotional security and the consideration of the child's life in his family, if possible. The schedule provides a variety of healthy diets corresponding to the age and the conditions for playing, moving, activity in the open air and resting. Within the agenda, the needs of each child should be met in order to have a transparent system in the life of the group, allowing the children to get acquainted with the expected events, and eliminating unnecessary waiting times. These also ensure the inner tranquillity of the group.

3.1.4 The staff of the nurseries

Nursery teachers take care of the children entrusted to him/her, in accordance with the National Core Curriculum of Nursery Education. Nursery teachers work 40 hours a week. The nursery education teacher provides emotional, physical, intellectual and social activities for young children, through educational and other playful activities.

Tasks of the nursery teachers:

- Planning and leading activities to promote the physical, mental and social development of children and their readiness for school;
- Planning and organising individual and group activities to develop children's motor skills, cooperation and social skills, self-confidence and perception;
- Developing children's language skills through storytelling, role-play, songs, story-telling, informal and group discussions;
- Guiding children in creative expression through artistic, dramatic, musical and physical education activities;
- Observing children in order to assess their development and, in cooperation with parents, to identify any developmental, emotional or health problems;
- Observing and assessing children's nutritional, health and safety needs and identifying obstacles to their development;
- Supervising children's activities to ensure their safety and to resolve conflicts;
- Guiding and assisting children in acquiring good eating, dressing and hygiene habits;
- Informing parents and staff about children's development and problems, identifying appropriate action and other services required;
- Establishing and maintaining cooperation with other organisations working with young children.

3.2 Kindergartens

According to the State and the Act CXC of 2011 on Public Education, a public education institution or kindergarten can be established by a local government, an ecclesiastic-legal person registered in Hungary and other organisation or person if he has acquired the rights to continue the activity.

Providing public education in kindergartens for all is a local government task. In the 2021/2022 school year 4589 kindergartens in Hungary were in function⁷⁾. The number of enrolled children was 322.868, – mostly because of the population increase of the affected age group – their number was 5.3 thousand higher compared to the previous year. Lack of accommodation occurs mostly in agglomeration and in areas that are registered with higher birth rates (such as the Hungarian middle region). In order to divide the accommodation according to demand, aimed expansion programmes have commenced for institute renewal, group accommodation expansion and new constructions, or accommodation termination, organised on a Government level.

Following the past year's trend, in the 2022 school year out of the population between 3-6 years, the rate of children attending kindergarten is 84%. The number of teachers employed in kindergartens is 31.5 thousand, about equal to the year before. The increase in the number of teachers and kindergarten groups was smaller than the growth of the child population, this is why the number of children attending a kindergarten group slightly increased. On a national level approximately 10.3 children come to one teacher, and 21.7 children to a group. There are 9200 children with special needs, 580 more than a year before. The majority (82.2%) takes part in integrated education.

If in a settlement there are at least eight kindergarten-aged children with permanent residence and if (based of demographic data) it can be assumed that their number will remain unchanged for at least another three years, the local municipalities must provide kindergarten care locally (if requested so by at least eight affected parents).

3.2.1 Admission requirements

Children may be admitted to kindergarten upon application. Children are admitted to kindergarten after the age of 3 and stay in kindergarten until the age of 6 or 7, due to the flexible school start. Parents are obliged to enrol their children who are required to attend kindergarten under law on the date defined. The obligatory enrolment of children of the age of 3 is controlled by the notary of the settlement.

7) The latest available data base: https://www.ksh.hu/stadat_files/okt/okt0007.html [02. 04. 2023.]

The head of kindergarten decides about admission. The parent may ask for the admission of his/her child at any time, since the admission of children is continuous throughout the year. In conformity with the principle of the free choice of kindergarten, a parent may apply for admission to any kindergarten. Research data evidence that 50% of parents are in the position to choose kindergarten freely. (In towns with county rights, their rate is 85%, in Budapest, 45%, while in small settlements, it is 28 %.) The key aspect taken into consideration when selecting a kindergarten is the distance between the home and the kindergarten. As shown by relevant data, in big towns approximately one-fifth of children is enrolled in a kindergarten outside their kindergarten admission district.

Besides the principle of the free choice of kindergarten, a district system is in use. The system ensures that every child has access to kindergarten care. The kindergarten is obliged to enrol and take over the child who is compulsory to go to kindergarten and if his / her residence is located in the kindergarten's district. The local municipality defines admission districts for kindergartens; in micro villages, a district may consist of one or two settlements, while in towns it is a smaller geographical area.

If a kindergarten that has fulfilled its supply obligation (i.e. taken on all applicants) still has places available, it can take on additional applicants. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of children that can be admitted, the head of the kindergarten cooperating with the local government convenes a committee to propose a place for additional admission. Attendance at kindergarten education is compulsory, so one of the district kindergartens must admit all children has reached the age of 3.

3.2.2 Age levels and grouping of children

The head of kindergarten decides about the placement of the children admitted to the kindergarten into groups, taking the opinion of the parents and the kindergarten teachers into consideration. The kindergarten can also enrol a child over 2.5 years of age in the area where every 3 years of age and older children's application for admission has been fulfilled. The kindergarten also carries out the tasks related to child day care as defined in the Act on the Protection of Children and Guardianship Administration for every 3-year-old child. Kindergarten groups are organised in a way that the number of children in one group does not exceed the maximum number defined in the Public Education Act (25 children).

The institutions may place the enrolled children in various groups, 39% of the kindergarten groups are homogeneous in terms of age, 17% consist of two age groups, and 43% consist of more than two age groups in the year of 2023.

3.2.3 Organisation of time

The maintainer of the kindergarten decides on the opening hours of the institution. As a rule, daily opening hours fall in line with the parents' working hours. On average, kindergartens are open 10.44 hours a day (deviation: 1.03). The daily schedule is defined in a manner that enables parents to bring and collect their children without disturbing kindergarten activities.

During the summer holiday, when kindergartens are closed (the duration of this period may vary by operator; normally, it is 2-4 weeks), a more central institution provides day care service for those parents, who cannot provide their child's home care. On working days when no kindergarten education is offered (maximum 5 days per year), while the kindergarten teachers participate in professional programs, kindergartens also provide day care at the parent's request. Until February 15th in the school year, parents must be informed about the closing days of the kindergarten, and at least seven days before the working days without education.

The kindergarten year starts on 1st September of each year and lasts till 31st August. However, children can go to kindergarten in the middle of the year if they reach the statutory age limit (3 years of age). The kindergarten education takes place in the context of occupations involving the entire kindergarten life necessary for the child's education, so the children are cared in all groups of the kindergarten during the entire time. There are different kindergarten teachers in the morning and afternoon time with the children. In a group, they alternate with a total overlap of two hours per day.

3.2.4 Organisation of the day and week

Kindergarten education can be implemented on the basis of an approved pedagogical program, which is controlled by experts. Education can be organised in the context of activities involving the whole kindergarten life, with the absolute presence and involvement of the kindergarten teacher. The weekly agenda of each kindergarten group is prepared by the kindergarten teachers in accordance with the principles of the pedagogical program and the institutional organisational rules.

The schedule contains the plans for differentiated activities that may be performed parallel. Kindergarten teachers organise group activities of gradually increasing duration (5-35 minutes) that improve the children's cooperative skills and task oriented attitude. The daily schedule falls in line with the various activities and the children's individual needs, while taking into consideration local culture, customs and demands. Regularity, along with recurring aspects, offer emotional stability to the children.

In the organisation of kindergarten life, care (taking physical needs into account) has a prominent role. The kindergarten teacher educates even during the care process, builds relationships with the children, and helps to develop their autonomy.

In terms of pedagogy, the schedule is continuous and flexible, and takes the key role of play into account. The National Public Education Act defines the responsibilities, competence and operating conditions (personnel requirements, employment requirements and requirements related to material facilities) of kindergartens, and gives authorisation for a professional regulatory framework.

3.2.5 The staff of the kindergartens

The community of kindergarten staff shall be composed of the following persons employed by the institution: employees who have an employment relationship with the kindergarten: kindergarten teachers, assistants, nurses, kitchen staff and the gardener or technical assistant.

The Board of Education is the body with powers under the Public Education Act, which is the community of teachers of the kindergarten, which is responsible for the most important deliberative and decision-making body of the institution. The board of governors is made up of all the teaching staff and the employees of the kindergarten.

Kindergarten teachers take care of the children entrusted to him/her, in accordance with the National Core Curriculum for Kindergarten Education and the local pedagogical programme. Kindergarten teachers work 40 hours a week. The time spent in a group is 32 hours. The remaining 8 hours can be used for administration, family visits, parental meetings, reception, preparation and follow-up of celebrations, teachers' meetings, and preparation of supplementary materials or other activities.

Tasks of the kindergarten teachers:

- In the context of the educational and developmental activities ensuring the physical well-being of children
- Protection of the physical integrity of the children, moral protection, the development of their personality, and the objective and multifaceted transmission of knowledge.
- Differentiation according to the individual abilities of children, talents, socio-cultural background and maturity, individual needs.
- Evaluating and recording the performance and progress of children using the group diary on the children's individual sheets.
- Teaching and motivating children, according to their age and the level of cognitive development and the social skills

- Informing parents and children about issues that concern them, and alerting parents when it is necessary to protect the rights of their child or promoting his/her development

Assistants are fully responsible for the physical safety of the children. It is required to ensure the physical needs of the children, to ensure the children's needs, and to support the optimal development of the children supervised by the kindergarten teachers. During occupations, under the guidance of the kindergarten teacher, helps to ensure the supervision of the children. Activities that can be carried out in parallel organising and carrying out activities which may be carried out in parallel. Helps to organise the smooth running of activities. Monitors the activities of the group and children, plans for the children and groups and helps to implement them responsibly.

Participates in the organisation and implementation of the celebrations of kindergarten events. Supports children who need individual help. Helps to promote diversity by setting a personal example of acceptance of differences. Helping to create a safe environment for children, to avoid accidents.

Tasks of the assistants:

- Under the direction of the kindergarten teacher, helps with the educational work in the group
- Responsible for the care of the physical needs of the children and the optimal support of their development.
- Supervised by the kindergarten teacher, helps with organising the activities in the group, preparing the equipment, helping with the rearrangement of the group room and providing individual assistance to children as necessary.
- Supporting the smooth integration of children.
- Actively participating in children's care activities, such as feeding, dressing, cleaning etc.
- Helping children during walks and in extra-curricular activities.
- Practising with the children some of the elements of the developmental therapies they have learned, according to the teacher's instructions.
- Assisting with medical examinations of children as needed, providing first aid.
- Under the guidance of the head of the kindergarten, carrying out the administrative tasks, supporting him/her in his/her work.

Nurses help with the care of the children, dressing them, and taking care of their hygiene, supervised by the kindergarten teacher. They are actively involved in the management of children's kindergarten life.

Tasks of the nurses:

- They help with the care of the children, dressing them, and taking care of their hygiene, according to the schedule set by the head teacher.

- They are actively involved in the cultural management of meals, distribute the meals together with the kindergarten teachers, remove the dishes after meals and take them to the sink.
- Laying down beds and bed linen to ensure a peaceful rest
- Helps prepare the equipment for play and other activities, following the instructions of the kindergarten teacher.
- Actively participates in celebrations.
- Accompanies the group of children on walks and excursions, assisting the nursery teachers,
- Participates in the daily care of the plants and animals entrusted to him/her.
- Supervises and cares for children who fall ill during the day until a parent comes to pick them up.
- Keeping the nursery premises clean and in order in the division of labour.
- Weekly disinfectant cleaning of the rooms, changing rooms and toilets.
- Washes, irons and repairs textiles in the children's group according to the agreed division of labour.

4. The system of teacher training

4.1 Infant and Early Childhood Educator BA

The duration of studies is 6 semesters. Required number of credits for Bachelor's degree: 180 credits. The objective of the programme is to train infant and early childhood educators who, based on their knowledge, skills and attitude, are capable of satisfying the physical and psychological needs of the education and development of children under the age of three. Those who understand the early childhood education system and are capable of performing early childhood education tasks in daycare centres and other institutes, educating children under the age of three with the autonomy and responsibility expected from their professional competency. Those who are capable of professional innovation, social engagement, continuous renewal and development.

Fields of the programme: Social sciences, IT 18 credits; Pedagogy, psychology 55 credits; Health science 24 credits; The methodology of day care and institutionalised early childhood education, development support and care 30 credits; Practical training 30 credits.

4.2 Kindergarten Educator BA

The duration of studies is 6 semesters. Required number of credits for Bachelor's degree: 180 credits. The purpose of the training is to train kindergarten educators who are able to perform the tasks of kindergarten education, to educate children aged 3-7 and to practise the pedagogical profession. In addition to the above, the aim of the training of students choosing the ethnic minority specialisation is to train kindergarten educators who are able to educate children aged 3-7 in Hungarian as well as in ethnic minority language, to develop and form ethnic minority identity adjusting to age groups and to mediate ethnic minority culture. Fields of the programme: Pedagogy, psychology, social sciences, IT 32-45 credits; Methodology of the activities of pre-school education (game; poetry, storytelling; singing, music, singing games, children dance; drawing, painting, moulding, hand-work; physical activity; active learning of the outside world; work-related activities) 54-72 credits; Practical training module: 26-34 credits. Requirements of the practical training: planning, organising and managing complex, parallel, differentiated activities within the framework of group and individual exercises, analysing and documenting them, making reflections and self-reflections.

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NURSEMAIDS, NURSES, PRESCHOOL TEACHERS: THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PROFESSIONS

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1. From care to education

With the notion that education is a lifelong process becoming deeply rooted internationally and across most of the world and with **lifelong education and learning** now an established term, there has been a shift in the way we perceive and discuss the role played by early childhood education and care (ECEC) in supporting preschool age children.

Through the prism of lifelong learning, ECEC institutions are now seen as the initial, introductory starting point in children's educational development, as people taking their first steps on an education pathway that begins in early childhood and continues throughout life in all its different shapes and forms. Preschools and kindergartens (ages 3–6) are therefore quite naturally seen as part of the education system, as the gateway leading onto the education pathway and as an integral component of the network of institutions that shape the individual's education. Thus viewed, the early start is the key that unlocks this education gateway for everybody. Equitably, universally, inclusively.

The evidence for this can be seen in **education ministries** taking on responsibility for the entire preschool sector; in the growing number of countries with compulsory preschooling; in the onus in many countries on the need for high quality

preschool education programmes; and in moves to bring preschool qualification requirements in line with school teacher qualifications; and so forth.

All this applies to Slovakia as well, albeit with historical differences. One need only think of the changes in the language used to describe the role of kindergartens over the last twenty years. Up until the early 1990s it would not have occurred to anyone to talk about preschool *education*; before that the term used was developmental care. Nor could you find the word education in the title of the national curricular documents for kindergartens and day-care centres.

The national curricula in Slovakia (and former Czechoslovakia) were known as ten-year **developmental** programmes for day-care centres and kindergartens (e.g. Program výchovnej práce, 1987) and the terminology did not change until 1999 when the first post-revolution national kindergarten curriculum was produced and which contained the word ‘education’ in its title: **Developmental Care and Education Programme for Kindergartens** (Program výchovy a vzdelávania v materských školách 1999). In the most recent curriculum, from 2008, the word ‘development’ has disappeared completely. It follows the pattern used for all the national school curricula and is called the **State Education Programme ISCED 0 – pre-primary education**. In line with the education law, all existing and future kindergarten curricula will be based around the newly adopted term ‘education’. Hence the kindergarten education programme has become the first in a series of education curricula for the entire school system.

This initially innocuous-looking subtle difference has nonetheless been accompanied by other important changes. Seen from the perspective of the kindergarten profession, one such change was the landmark legislation that recategorised the kindergartens. Previously having been part of the institutional system that provided different types of education and care, the kindergartens were taken out of the non-school developmental care sector and made part of the school system under the education law of 2008. The emphasis was thus on the educational ethos of the preschool sector, which was now given a direct role in shaping children’s education pathways, while preschool education became part of the formal education system and the lifelong learning process.

In 2021 this role was further underlined by the decision to make the last year of preschool education in Slovakia compulsory for all five-year-olds (like in many other countries) and to introduce so-called compulsory **pre-primary education**.

2. Barrier-free transition

The gradual transition away from developmental care provision and towards education, fostered by the notion of lifelong education and learning (and an extensive

reliance on English-language documents, in which the term education is usually translated as *vzdelávania* despite the Slovak term being narrower and less universal than the English one) was neither particularly dramatic by Slovak standards nor particularly challenging, largely for two reasons.

The first is that the term developmental care and **education** began to feature in the programme documents around the time the daycare centres began disappearing from the ECEC sector, and these were more tightly bound up with the concept of developmental care for the under-threes. Hence the preschool discourse applied only to the kindergartens (for the over threes), where the transition from ‘development’ to ‘education’ did not raise any concerns. Had it applied to younger children, the situation would have been more complicated and ambiguous as it would have been hard to talk about the daycare centres in terms of education only.

The first curricular programme containing the word ‘education’ in its title was exclusively for kindergartens, unlike the previous ones, and so applied to children aged three to six. All the previous programmes that had been created and revised since the 1960s had been developmental programmes, partly because they were for both daycare centres and kindergartens and therefore for children aged six months to six years.

The second reason for this is the historical status of preschools in former communist states, which includes Slovakia as part of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Under the first communist **education law** of 1948 (Law 95/1948 of the basic legislation on comprehensive schooling) kindergartens were made part of the school system.

The relevant part of the law states:

§8

Kindergartens shall work closely with the families of three-year-old children until they begin attending national school to provide developmental care and health and social protection.

§9

1. *Kindergartens shall normally be set up in a municipality or enterprise where at least 20 children from the municipality or enterprise enrol; if the number falls below 15 children, the kindergarten may be closed down.*
2. *A class may contain a maximum of 30 children; where this number is exceeded an additional class may be set up if the circumstances allow.*
3. *Kindergartens shall be set up and closed down by the local education office, which is also responsible for determining the catchment area.*

§10

1. *Physically and mentally healthy children normally resident in the catchment area and who enrol shall be accepted by the kindergarten.*

2. *The government shall set out the conditions under which kindergarten attendance is compulsory for children aged five and over.*
3. *The developmental care provided by these schools is free.*

§ 11

1. *The Ministry of Education and Outreach, in agreement with the Ministry of Health, Social care and Food, shall regulate the social welfare, health and social protection and dietary requirements applying to children in kindergartens.*
2. *If the kindergarten catchment area contains a daycare centre or crèche, the kindergarten management shall be responsible for providing pedagogical supervision.*

Under the law of 1960 (on the developmental care and education system), the daycare centres were designated part of the system. The section of the law introducing this amendment (Law 186/1960 on the developmental care and education system) reads:

§3

Preschool care

(1) In accordance with the aims of an advanced socialist society children from the earliest age up to the age of six shall be provided with developmental care and adequate preparation for primary education.

(2) Preschool care shall be provided in daycare centres and kindergartens so as to assist families with all their childcare needs, thereby enabling women to participate in public life and societal work and to help them develop fully and make use of their skills and interests.

§4

Daycare centres and kindergartens

(1) Daycare centres shall work closely with families to provide comprehensive child development from the youngest age up to the age of three.

(2) Kindergartens shall work closely with families to provide comprehensive child development from the age of three up to the start of nine-year basic school. The national committees will create the necessary conditions to enable the attendance of five-year-olds above all, but also younger children enrolled by their parents. With the aim of encouraging favourable development in children with sensory, mental and physical defects, the government may make kindergarten attendance compulsory for such children from the age of three.

(3) Daycare centres and kindergartens may be set up as health and developmental care centres under one roof; the details shall be determined by the Ministry of Education and Culture in agreement with the Ministry of Health and other participating authorities and bodies.

Hence there can be no doubt that the educational ethos of the school system applies to the kindergartens, and later the daycare centres, albeit implicitly initially and without direct reference to ‘education’, from the point at which they were integrated into the school system and became subject to education law.

Yet, as the legislative extracts above show, although the preschools were placed within education, as it were, their role is not described in educational terms. The phrases used are **developmental care** and **preschool care**. The law of 1948 explicitly refers to health and social welfare as well as developmental care, and it is not until 1960 that the law assigns preschools the function of providing ‘adequate preparation for primary education’.

In both cases we can see how daycare centres came to be part of the system, initially as separate entities under the pedagogical supervision of the kindergartens and later as extensions of the kindergartens under one roof. By 1967 **joint daycare centres and kindergartens** had begun appearing under the tutelage of the education ministry, which was the first step towards an integrated preschool care system and the gradual transition to (pre)school education. The distinction between the daycare centres and kindergartens only remained (until the daycare centres disappeared completely in the 1990s) where daycare centres, either separate or combined with a kindergarten, provided both developmental and preventative care and were under the remit of the health ministry.

From 2008, as mentioned above, the kindergarten became strongly associated with an educational role. They are defined as the initial rung of the education system and have the official status of a school, follow the national curriculum and, in the eyes of the law, constitute an ‘education level’.

Kindergartens are defined in more neutral terms in the education law of 2008 (Law 245/2008 on early years care and education):

§28

Kindergartens foster the child’s personal development in all its social and emotional, intellectual, physical, moral and aesthetic aspects, they develop the child’s skills and abilities, and lay the foundations for the child’s subsequent education. They prepare the child for life in society in line with the child’s individual and age-specific characteristics.

However, when it comes to describing the processes and outcomes of kindergarten provision, these are categorised in educational terms. For example, the law states that ‘kindergarten education provision shall attract a partial fee’ (§28(5)), which is non-payable where the ‘pre-primary education is compulsory’ (§28, (6a)) and, as noted above, completion of kindergarten is taken to mean attainment of that education level. The only distancing from school education in the legal terminology is found in the consistent use of the category ‘pupils’ to refer to those

attending primary and secondary school and ‘children’ to refer to those attending kindergarten.

The greater alignment of preschools with education settings is indicative of a sort of *educationalisation*, or even *scholarisation*, of the preschool sector, even though the distinctiveness of kindergarten education is repeatedly stressed, supposedly distancing preschool settings from (above all) what is typically thought of as education. In practice though it has the opposite effect as the closer link between preschool education and subsequent compulsory schooling creates pressures to ensure that the first years of primary education tuition are more flexible and reminiscent of the way preschool education is organised.

Nonetheless the decades of convergence between preschool care and preschool education on the one hand and school education in the proper sense on the other have led to preschool settings being increasingly viewed through the prism of education. We seem to be losing sight of the roots of ECEC that are indicative of the more comprehensive function of the preschool sector and which are quite different from the roots of school education. These roots cannot be ignored and should be kept in mind so early years care can be seen in all its complexity, which will help us to maintain a sensible view of this sector and build on its functions, rather than reducing it to one-dimensional educational support for children.

3. Global roots of ECEC

Here I draw on a synoptical historical study by S. Kamerman (2006) who, in her attempt to identify the roots of ECEC from a global perspective and trace the various trajectories in different countries on different continents, concludes that in nineteenth century Europe early years care was about (1) protecting at-risk and neglected children and looking after the children of working mothers, and (2) enriching the development of middle-class children. Then, after the Second World War, according to Kamerman, ECEC policies began additionally to reflect the growth in the number of working women seeking good quality care for their children. The last and most recent factor shaping ECEC policy is the push for all children to be ready for formal education before starting primary school.

The educational ethos of the early years care sector is therefore much more recent and does not have historical foundations. Initially, the care ethos was basically a social, charitable and philanthropic one. Later on it was expanded to serve the needs of the accompanying labour market policy and economic and political attempts to create a middle class that would form the main economic and social plank of society.

This basic scenario of the roots and historical development of ECEC applies to Slovak history as well. Up until 1918 Slovakia shared the history of Austria-Hungary and then that of Czechoslovakia. Then from 1948 onwards the socialist model of

early years care and preschool education applied. Kamerman does not cover this in any detail and simply outlines the current state of ECEC provision in transitional postcommunist countries, which does not differ radically from the international situation. Kamerman (2006, p. 22) merely concludes that the postcommunist countries 'had a long and extensive history of ECEC for the 3–6 year olds after World War II, but that history is not analysed in any depth from an international perspective and nor is it well-known.

As one of the best historians on preschooling in Slovakia, J. Mikleš (1970, p.13), states the route to the beginnings of ECEC in Slovakia in the nineteenth century 'led from London via Vienna and Budín to Banská Bystrica and Trnava', pretty much where the first early childcare institutions were set up (children's care institutes) following the 'infant school' model founded in London out of the same philanthropic motivations as the first ECEC institutions across Europe.

In Slovakia, even after the First World War, the historical situation was largely the same as throughout Austria-Hungary, especially in origin. As indicated above, after Czechoslovakia became part of the communist bloc, ECEC took on a new hue and direction under the central economy and the centralist social, health and education policy. And yes, as Kamerman concludes, it had a characteristically dense preschool network that was under the complete control of the state.

4. The density of the socialist-era network

The rapid growth in preschools for all children from the very youngest to primary school age was typical of all communist bloc countries and was mainly down to the policy of full (artificial) employment for all working age adults and hence a much higher proportion of women in the workforce. Added to this was the communist notion of developmental care and education under which children were to be raised in the spirit of collectivism and the common ideology. Moreover, under the centralist health-care policy the emphasis was on uniform medical treatment and prevention, targeting the child population through a network of treatment and prevention centres.

In this network of institutional healthcare for healthy children, the first rung was the daycare centres. These fell under the remit of the health ministry throughout their existence (up until their demise in the early 1990s), either as independent institutions or as part of the aforementioned joint **day care centres/kindergartens**. The latter were the responsibility of the education ministry, but the health ministry regulations applied to the daycare part. That had specific implications for the professional and qualification standards applying to the staff working in these different types of ECEC and for the way the organisations were run, which we will return to later.

The rapid expansion of institutional early years care was visible from the start of the socialist regime and continued for several decades. As Hanzelová and Kešelová

(2014, p. 39) observe in their overview, ‘the expansion of the daycare centres began in the 1950s and was closely tied to women’s participation in the labour force... The growing number of daycare centres and places continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s as a result of pro-family policies and the subsequent growth in the number of preschool age children and did not stop until the end of the 1980s, partly as a result of the falling birth rate and partly because of the extended maternity leave. In almost four decades (1950–1988) the number of daycare centre places grew more than eight-fold.’ This can easily be seen in the table 1 below provided by the authors.

Table 1. Number of daycare centre places

(Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic)

Year	1950	1953	1960	1970	1975	1980	1984	1985	1986	1987	1998	1989	1990
Places	5,924	8,224	10,596	23,499	27,947	41,355	49,103	49,572	50,112	50,515	51,309	49,191	37,376

This trend was reflected in the kindergartens, which were aimed at children aged 3–6. The centrally planned economy and associated labour force, along with the support for working women, meant that the kindergarten network grew massively. For example, from the 1960s up to 1990, the number of kindergartens doubled (from 1,901 to 4,025), while the kindergarten roll grew from 83.9 thousand to 216.4 thousand (in Hanzelová, Kešelová, 2014).

By the early 1990s the situation was quite different: the daycare centres had disappeared completely and the number of children attending preschool education fell – by 2012 the number of kindergartens had shrunk to 2.9 thousand – only to grow again at the turn of the last decade.

The historical development of ECEC in Slovakia was, as we have noted, influenced by changes to the ECEC profession, including qualifications, job profile and use of terminology. As we have seen in the nineteenth century the first childcare institutions were set up, which existed until 1948 and were associated with the *nursemaid* profession. While it is true that the first of these (the model ones) resembled those found abroad, were roughly copied from the famous infant schools found in Britain and were staffed by male teachers (A. Rehlingen, a teacher at the childcare institute in Trnava, is most often mentioned in this context), as the network expanded women were employed as nursemaids. At this stage then general references to ‘teaching’ as a profession cannot be made with any accuracy.

The network of childcare institutes that gradually began to appear up until the second world war was not very extensive, ranging from approximately 150 at the end of the nineteenth century and 400 on the eve of the first world war, before falling to 160 before the outbreak of the second world war and growing again to 751 after it ended and up to 1948 (Hlavná redakcia, 1984). The authors were unable to find any later data on the number of nursemaids. It is worth noting that the nursemaids had to have some kind of qualification, be it a short course or, from the end of the nineteenth century, a two-year course at the Institute for Training Nursemaids (the first was set up in Prešov in 1893), which was in its way the precursor to subsequent preschool qualifications. Thus up until 1948 the preschool's history was one of nursemaids (and the lower position of *nanny*).

5. Qualifications

After 1948 the creation of the new system ushered in a new era in job qualifications and profiles in the ECEC sector. As noted above, the new system was based on the concept of daycare centres for the under threes and kindergartens for children aged 3–6 (in 1948 the childcare institutes were renamed *materské školy* (kindergartens) after the *école maternelle* founded in France by Marie Pape Carpentier). A new socialist work, health, education and social policy were applied that was reflected in both the preschool ethos and the staff qualifications.

To sum up, the daycare centres were shaped by the new socialist healthcare system and were part of a network of treatment and prevention centres regulated by **law 103/1951 on the uniform preventative care and treatment** underpinning the new socialist healthcare policy:

§ 1

The state shall provide preventative healthcare and treatment in a uniform manner such that the population receives good, continuous and systemic care, focusing especially on workers and the healthy development of the new generation.

In pursuit of this policy the state set up a network of so-called *implementation bodies* which included *care facilities for women and children*. This category contained the daycare centres along with maternity centres, children's homes for the under-threes, toddler institutes and women's and children's clinics. As the daycare centres were prevention and treatment facilities they followed the socialist state's healthcare and childcare ethos. By contrast the kindergartens, as we saw above, had become part of the school system under the first socialist education law of 1948 on comprehensive education. Consequently they followed education policy and played a role in children's health and social welfare in addition to providing developmental care.

As the decades passed the distinctions between the daycare centres and kindergartens began to blur (under the legislative incentives of having both under one

roof and under the introduction of joint daycare centres/kindergartens). However, they did not converge completely and the differences between them, and the policies and regulatory mechanisms underpinning them, meant that they largely retained their original meaning.

Under state policy the professional basis of ECEC began to change conceptually as well. While the previous childcare institutes had been based on a unidimensional definition of nursemaids (for children), the new model of professional provision of early years care in daycare centres and kindergartens related to both health and education, or to be more precise it represented the point at which health, education and care intersected. Despite the shared ECEC ethos, the professional side of daycare provision for the under-threes was healthcare-oriented, while the professional side of kindergarten provision veered off in an educational direction. Hence, in the daycare centres the staff was nurses (healthcare work) and in the kindergartens the staff was kindergarten teachers (educational work).

6. Children's nurses and the medicalisation of preschool settings

We will now look at this in more detail. Given that under the new socialist system the daycare centres formed part of the treatment and preventative care system they came under the healthcare profession. A new category of middle-ranking healthcare practitioners was created in which nurses represented the most basic type of practitioner. The nurses' role was then adapted to meet the needs of the new system of preventative healthcare treatment. Having traditionally tended the sick, under the new system, the nurses' function was to provide preventative healthcare (aimed at the healthy population, specifically children). And so out of the original nursing role as nursemaid (a universal category) a whole new series of nursing occupations was created.

Under the new preventative healthcare treatment policy, nurses were further categorised into *healthcare nurses* (closest to the original nursing role), *women's nurses* (here there is an interesting socialist story regarding the somewhat magical transformation of midwives and birthing assistants) and *children's nurses*. All nurses completed four years of secondary healthcare schooling (ISCED 3) (with the exception of women's nurses who, with the onus on maturity, studied ISCED 3 level at general secondary school, followed by a two-year specialist course at ISCED 4 level).

The children's nurses were farthest away from the original nursing role (hospital-focused) as preventative medicine was aimed primarily at the healthy child population and that field led into daycare centre jobs under the new healthcare policy. The children's nurses were one of a number of middle-ranking nursing categories and from 1951 this new nursing field was taught at secondary healthcare schools,

where the curriculum took on a developmental or educational dimension, through subjects such as pedagogy, psychology and the developmental methodologies used in the daycare centres.

Children's nursing as a subject (and the profession itself) was still nursing because it was a category of healthcare practitioner in the care/medicine/hospital dimension of the profession. The shift was towards working with healthy children in developmental care centres that also provided 'preventive care and treatment'. Later this shift was reinforced as each daycare centre was allocated a paediatrician who visited regularly to medically supervise the work of the daycare centre and the health of the children. Daycare centres employing nurses who were not children's nurses (such as medical nurses or women's nurses) had to ensure the nurses received daycare centre training, which was organised by the daycare authority.¹

The hospital, nursing or medical nature of the field and the work performed in the daycare centres was visually symbolised in the compulsory work uniform. Before the specialisations were introduced, the nurse's uniform was designed for hospital settings (and retained elements of the uniforms worn by the nuns who worked in hospitals – the Slovak word for nurse is the same as the word for nun). It consisted of a blue dress and white pinafore and a starched white head covering or nurse's bonnet). This uniform was also worn by nurses working in non-hospital settings and so was worn by the nurses in daycare centres. It symbolised both the nurses' affiliation to the healthcare sector and the link between the developmental setting of the daycare centres (and kindergartens) and the medical setting of the healthcare clinics, manifested in the strict adherence to hygiene standards, cleanliness and an almost untouchable sterility.

It fed into the so-called *medicalisation* of preschools and preschool care that is considered a typical feature of socialist preschool systems (Cotič, 1998; Zorec, 2013). In Slovakia it also stemmed from the link between early years care and the healthcare sector. But it was not just that the two settings (healthcare and education) overlapped through the penetration of medical approaches and professionals into the daycare centres. It was also a sophisticated use of soft power and subordinating control techniques by the state, through the strict hygiene regulations that enabled it to exert control over the entire system and all the individuals within it (Cotič, 1998). Foucault's concept of the invisible and subtle operation of micro-physical power is applicable here.

Further legitimisation and reinforcement occurred through the fact that the centres were staffed by children's nurses wearing nurse's uniforms, while the highly medicalised environment of the daycare centre settings was reflected throughout the preschool sector. But it did not end at the strict enforcement of the onerous hygiene standards in preschool settings, which have basically continued up to today. There were rules on spatial organisation, architecture and interior furnishings,

strict dietary standards and food handling and preparation, and to some degree the symbolic generalisation and manifestation of these standards through the preschool staff uniforms.

Although the daycare nurse's uniforms remained roughly the same throughout the existence of the daycare centres (up until the early 1990s), there was some liberalisation over time, reflecting the increasingly 'civic orientation' of hospital settings, with the three-piece uniform becoming a dress or white uniform (T-shirt and white trousers). Paradoxically the kindergartens voluntarily subscribed to this medicalised dress code, doing so symbolically and as the opportunity presented itself, without it being imposed upon them from outside. Staff at some kindergartens introduced the rule that their work clothes had to at least create some impression of clinical 'cleanliness', usually in the form of white cotton trousers and a white T-shirt or blouse. We have found no record of this occurring elsewhere and it appears to be specific to Slovak kindergartens; nonetheless it is an important validation of the whole process of diffusion, whereby the preschool sector acquired its medical and educational characteristics against the socialist backdrop to the creation of the daycare centre and kindergarten network.

7. Nurses and teachers

The transformation of the childcare institutes into kindergartens and their incorporation into the socialist system of comprehensive schooling firmly underpinned the developmental and educational ethos, while the staff were seen as educational practitioners and employed as teachers. Professionally then, once the kindergartens became part of the school system they were staffed by preschool teachers. In parallel the education system created conditions for the provision of preschool teacher training, and right from the offset in 1950 *pedagogical gymnasiums* or grammar schools were established, which offered two separate diplomas, one for kindergarten teachers and one for primary school teachers.

Three years later the gymnasiums became *pedagogical schools*. They continued to offer two separate diplomas, but the kindergarten diploma was one year shorter and included a final year of supervised teaching experience. The level was equivalent to ISCED 3. In 1960 the primary school teacher training was moved to the tertiary education sector and the pedagogical schools specialised in offering kindergarten teacher training, and still do today. Students can take either a four-year course at ISCED 3 level or a two-year course at ISCED 4. The courses are set up so school leavers can obtain a kindergarten teacher qualification as well as an activity leader/trainer qualification for after-school activities (school clubs).

At this stage (of the socialist ECEC model) professional provision was two-dimensional, stemming from the parallel (co)existence of the daycare centres and the kindergartens and their shared, albeit semi-distinctive, function in delivering state

education, social, labour and health policy. The staff, who were either healthcare practitioners (children's nurses) or educational practitioners (preschool teachers), worked alongside each other (but always separately). The differences were evident not just in the work the practitioners did but also symbolically in the uniform worn (sometimes overlapping) and in the way the work was organised. The children's nurses were on the healthcare practitioner pay scale and so their working day was eight hours and spent almost entirely in the daycare centres. The kindergarten teachers were educational practitioners and so the rules of teaching applied, which meant they spent less time in the workplace (the classroom), approximately two hours less per day than the children's nurses. The teachers spent the morning and afternoon in the classroom. There were also differences in the physical organisation as, although the daycare centres and kindergartens could be located in the same building or share different pavilions, they were spatially and architecturally divided into two separate parts of the one entity. As the kindergartens were more educational, they were divided into classes, which is a spatial organisational concept that applies to schools. Whereas the daycare centres were more healthcare oriented and thus divided into *units*, which is a spatial organisation concept typically found in clinical settings.

It is worth noting that while there was generally one teacher in a kindergarten class at one time (two teachers were allocated to one class, but they alternated so they were only together for a short time when the mid-morning and afternoon sessions overlapped), in a daycare unit multiple children's nurses worked together. The number of children per children's nurse was much lower (generally 6) and up to 30 children could be placed in a unit.

For completion we should add that the daycare centre staff also included nursemaids (like the ancillary staff at the old childcare institutes). They studied for a lower-level qualification at the healthcare schools. For a time pedagogical school leavers worked as nursemaids in the kindergartens, where they did the necessary work experience to complete their studies. However, nursemaid and other ancillary roles were not that common in kindergartens and so they were usually just considered teachers. Nonetheless, their existence made the kindergarten teacher identity more opaque, which was not the case with the children's nurses, despite the kindergarten and daycare staff performing very similar roles.

Given their job profile (nursing/medical/educational) the children's nurses were professionally suited to all aspects of working with children. Developmental care and a whole range of hygiene practices, bodily care (in the broader sense) and the biological and physical dimensions of the setting were all considered completely legitimate parts of the job. The kindergarten teacher's professional identity was primarily associated with the teaching and not necessarily with the non-pedagogical aspects of the job. And even where it was, and when the kindergarten teachers were quite happy to perform these roles, that identity often came up against external perceptions that working in a kindergarten is a form of 'baby-sitting', 'nan-

nying' or some form of general childcare, which is no different from the medical, social and even domestic childcare that the children's nurses quite happily identified with. Hence the kindergarten teachers had no identifiable characteristic distinguishing them from general childcare provision and that could capture the essence of their profession.

8. The pitfalls of the school model of teaching

For kindergarten teachers who are on their own in the classroom (basically the educational model), there is no specifically educational professional identity available to them because the pedagogical and non-pedagogical settings are not completely separate and the teacher's role relates to all aspects of the time children spend in kindergarten. Although it largely corresponds to the school teaching model, it is not implemented properly and sometimes even badly so. Primary school teaching is temporally, organisationally and spatially bound up with teaching and is limited to the time children spend in the part of the system that is professionally devoted to teaching (school, classroom).

But children remain in school even after the teaching has ended and attend school clubs, where there is another type of pedagogical practitioner – activity leaders/trainers. They are considered educational practitioners but the focus is different and they are generally less qualified than teachers (a primary school teacher is qualified to ISCED 7 level, while the minimum requirement for an activity leader is an ISCED 3 education qualification, which is the minimum qualification for kindergarten teachers).

Kindergarten teachers who attempt to identify the professional characteristics of their job often look to the administrative side and consider their professionalism to lie in the administrative tasks and skills associated with planning (Pupala et al., 2016; Kaščák, Pupala, 2018).

In primary schools the boundaries are more organisationally identifiable and correspond to the work profile and qualifications of the educational practitioner. In kindergartens where all the staff are kindergarten teachers, their 'teacher' status is more ambiguous and complicated as their work involves a whole range of care activities as well as the purely didactic ones (the latter being most closely associated with teaching). In kindergartens where the staff is teachers, there is no division of labour by qualification level. That is reflected in the uncertainties of the kindergarten teacher profession, the frustrations inherent in the non-recognition of the 'teacher' role of the kindergarten teacher and the disputes over the status of 'kindergarten teachers' within the teacher community.

These disputes are further exacerbated by legitimate questions over whether kindergarten teachers should be required to hold a master's degree (ISCED 7). (Kindergarten teachers are often sensitive to and sometimes offended by inferences that they are trainers or activity leaders despite being qualified to the same level as a teacher, and the same applies to practitioners working as activity leaders or trainers who are qualified at a level higher than the kindergarten teacher requirement.)

This is understandable as the problem is rooted in the fact that (at least in Slovakia) there is no classification system enabling us to distinguish between the different roles performed in the kindergartens and that would allow the work to be distributed more effectively among educational practitioners with different types of training, qualification level and responsibility (as is the case when allocating responsibilities among teachers and activity leaders/trainers in primary schools).

It was not such a problem, or took a different form, when the kindergartens were staffed solely by teachers with the same qualification level, that is, educated to ISCED 3 level (or ISCED 4) at secondary pedagogical school. The situation changed little, even in the 1970s when two university arts faculties began offering a preschool education degree (at masters level), which was taken by a handful of motivated students despite being required to hold a kindergarten qualification and have a specific number of years of kindergarten experience in order to be accepted onto the course. Applicants tended to be those who felt the need to develop professionally and managerially or to advance up the hierarchy, for example to the school inspectorate or teacher training institutes.

But the situation became more of a problem when teaching qualifications could be obtained not just by studying to ISCED 3 (or ISCED 4) level at the pedagogical schools but also by studying kindergarten education as part of a bachelor's degree at an education faculty (ISCED 6) under the many opportunities to undertake further study in preschool education at master's degree (ISCED 7) level, or obtain a 'minor' PhD (PhDr.) or even a third degree (PhD). But what effect did these different routes into obtaining a kindergarten teacher qualification have on their status? Curiously enough, and almost criminally, nothing at all. Regardless of the qualification held by the teacher and level of study they still have almost exactly the same role, with the same job description and range of duties, the same level of responsibility and the same work profile.

And so in kindergarten classrooms one can find teachers with only a school leaving exam, or with a bachelor degree or master's degree or 'minor' PhD or full PhD, all doing the same job. The only, albeit fairly insignificant, difference is in the pay, as the pay scale differs according to qualification level and field of study. Paradoxically this has a stifling effect: employers often select the least qualified candidate for kindergarten teacher jobs as it costs them less.

9. The end of the system and the nursing turn

We will return to this issue once we have summed up what happened when the joint system of preventative treatment and developmental child care that had developed under socialism ceased to work and began to collapse. Right at the beginning of the 1990s the childcare centres began to disappear from the childcare system. On the one hand, demand began to fall as more mothers with young children began to stay at home, and on the other there was a mental aversion to the childcare centres as they were a symbol of the collectivist pressures of communist ideology. In the end they were dropped from the healthcare system and none of the ministries was given the responsibility of setting up new care facilities.

Very young children who could not be looked after at home by a parent or someone else were sent to the new private care centres being set up under trade licence outside the remit of the state regulations on childcare provision and state supervision. As they were not registered developmental care institutions or social institutions or any other type of registered service, the state had no control over them. They could be set up by anyone holding the appropriate trade licence and following the relevant hygiene standards for child settings. Given the nature of this childcare provision there was no regulatory mechanism and nor did the founders, managers or childcare staff require professional qualifications. As the state was not involved and did not provide funding, the cost was met by the customers. Although the providers would have welcomed state regulation (and the prospect of financial support), for many years the state showed no interest in this childcare segment.

In tandem the children's nurses that had been one of the links in the professional ECEC system began disappearing. At the same time the healthcare profession was becoming increasingly popular (especially among nurses with similar qualifications to the kindergarten teachers), despite the field having nothing to do with early years care. Nonetheless the dynamism and changes brought about may be instructive when considering the rigidity of preschool education qualification requirements today. We will now look at the most important aspects of this dynamism.

First of all the system of middle-ranking healthcare practitioners disappeared, including all nursing categories associated with the secondary school education system at the ISCED 3 and ISCED 4 levels. With the international standardisation of nursing, there is no longer any distinction between children's nurses and healthcare nurses (and the women's nurses have become midwife assistants both in name and substance) under the minimum nursing qualification criterion (ISCED 6). Nursing qualifications have changed and the minimum requirement is now higher than the original kindergarten teacher qualification level.

Generally the nursing profession has become more closely aligned to the medical conception of nursing, which is why the ordinary children's nurses have disappeared, having become quite removed from the basic concept of nursing. These days one can become what was known as a 'children's nurse' by further qualifying as a nurse (with a degree) and specialising. But this is a paediatric specialisation and hence a medical one, which means that the nurses obtain a specialist education in 'paediatric nursing'. Hence it is a separate nursing qualification that is medically defined and has little in common with the conception of children's nursing that was part of the system of preventive healthcare and treatment and that gave rise to the daycare centres and the daycare nurses.

It is important to note that the nursing profession has become more complex and hierarchical, with greater distinctions between the various duties and responsibilities associated with the different jobs and the education levels required for the various nursing profession positions. The old middle-ranking healthcare practitioner qualification at ISCED 3 level no longer suffices for anyone wishing to work as a nurse but is the minimum qualification for healthcare assistants, whose job responsibilities differ from nurses. Nurses require an ISCED 6 level qualification, which, as we have noted, is higher than the qualification kindergarten teachers require, taking into account the minimum education requirements. Kindergarten teachers who fulfil the minimum requirements for working as a kindergarten teacher are now equivalent to a healthcare practitioner in the healthcare profession, not a nurse. Hypothetically if the daycare centre and kindergarten system still existed in the way it did several decades ago, then to work in a daycare centre one would need a nursing qualification and so the daycare centres staff would be more qualified than the pedagogic staff working in the kindergartens.

10. The emergence of the social sector and the return to care

If we return to the daycare centres and the period in which they disappeared or were plunged into a legal vacuum, i.e. the beginning of the 1990s, we see that the biggest change occurred in 2017. In that year law 448/2008 on social services was amended to apply to and formalise childcare for the under-threes. Childcare for the under-threes became part of social services and so is regulated by the labour and social affairs ministry and comes under *Childcare Facilities for Children under the Age of Three*. Hence the care provided takes on a whole new status, dimension and position insofar as national policy is concerned and compared to that in previous decades and which shaped our perceptions of it.

The legal definition of childcare facilities is as follows:

§ 32b Childcare Facilities for Children under the Age of Three

1. *Childcare facilities for children under the age of three shall provide services aimed at balancing family and working life through the provision of childcare for the under threes for a parent or natural person with custody of the child through a court order, undertaking professional study at a secondary school or higher education institution or returning to work or in gainful employment.*
2. *Childcare facilities for children aged under three shall provide care to children aged under three of a parent or natural person entrusted with the care of the child through a court decision if*
 - a) *he is unable for reasons set out in §31(3) to look after the child himself or with the help of the family and there are no other reasons why it is in the child's interest to proceed in accordance with a special regulation,*
 - b) *places shall not be awarded to the child of a parent or natural person who is custodian of the child through a court decision pursuant to (2a) or (1).*
3. *Childcare facilities for children aged under three provide*
 - a) *basic childcare,*
 - b) *food,*
 - c) *developmental care.*
4. *Childcare facilities for children aged under three shall continue to provide this social service up until 31 August once the child has reached the age of three.*
5. *Childcare facilities for children aged under three may provide care to a maximum of 12 children in a dayroom that operates as both a play area and nap area; this also applies where the nap area is structurally separate from the playroom and the children use both rooms. The number of children specified in the first sentence can be increased by a maximum of three if none of the children being cared for in the dayroom or play area and nap area is less than one year old.*

Under this completely new definition of care for the under-threes, new categories, job titles and qualifications apply to the childcare facility staff. The word 'carer' (similar to nursemaid) comes back into play, in the social policy sense of social services or care provision. Under Social Services Act §32b the staff providing the service are given the job title of 'childcare practitioners' and require a vocational qualification at ISCED 3 level covering 'also childcare as defined within the scope of this law' (i.e. not a specific field), or any ISCED 3 level qualification in conjunction with completion of at least a 220-hour accredited childcare course.

In addition to these qualifications, facilities attended by at least one child under the age of one must have at least one carer on the staff that is qualified as a nurse, midwife assistant or practice nurse. In other words, carers in childcare facilities require healthcare training. Hence in some cases nurses are involved in the running

of the facility; however, they are not employed as healthcare practitioners but as carers with a particular professional background.

It is also worth adding that although the new under three childcare facilities that fall under social services are legally obliged to provide developmental care in addition to their general task of meeting the child's ordinary needs and dietary requirements, it is a very general and non-binding requirement because the ministry responsible has not even set out a minimal framework for developmental care and nor has it involved the education ministry. The developmental care ethos of these facilities is therefore simply a declarative one and it is left up to the childcare service provider to decide what the developmental care consists of. One team of experts in ECEC, who wrote the preschool curriculum (Štátny vzdelávací program, 2016) took the initiative and created a framework developmental care programme for the under-threes (Pupala et al., 2020). Childcare facilities can use this if they wish when planning and designing the developmental care provided.

11. Pedagogical diversity

The kindergartens have not experienced anything like the upheavals in the day-care centres since the early 1990s. They have basically remained the sole provider of developmental care for preschool age children and have been affected only by the initial decline and subsequent growth in the kindergarten sector, which is presently suffering from a lack of capacity in some parts of Slovakia. With the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education for all children in the year before entry into primary school, the pressure has increased, making it harder to find kindergarten places for younger children in some areas.

Nor have there been any substantial changes to the preschool qualification requirements for kindergarten staff as described above. The basic kindergarten job is that of teacher with a broadly defined role regardless of education level and teaching qualification. Teachers with secondary school qualifications are roughly equal in number to those with a university degree at ISCED 6 level and, as noted above there is no difference in level of responsibility or duties performed.

With the expansion of inclusion and the introduction of compulsory preschooling, there is both a greater need for and shortage of assistants, but these jobs are non-teaching jobs. The most recent attempt to tackle this issue is the creation of 'assistant leader/trainer' posts to be funded out of the Recovery Plan (2021) and is intended to meet the acute need in kindergartens for assistants who can help children to adapt to kindergarten settings.

But this is far from a systemic solution to the issue of educational qualifications in preschool education, as the assistants will not be pedagogical staff and so their in-

roduction will not lead to greater differentiation and hierarchy in the kindergarten teaching profession, as can be seen in the analogical healthcare positions. That task and journey still awaits us. Embarking upon it will require us to learn to better distinguish ECEC goals and services so they reflect genuine differences in provision. That means ensuring that schematic decisions are not just shared between two ministries and that qualification requirements are not determined by the age of the children. These should be set so they reflect actual needs across a whole range of social, healthcare, developmental care and other forms of support and take into account the needs of families and the complexity of the environments in which they live.

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PROFESSIONAL PROFILES OF TEACHERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN SLOVENIA

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1. Introduction

In this text, written as part of the PROROK project, in which Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary, in addition to our country, participate, we will first present the history of preschool education in Slovenia, beginning with the establishment of the first institution for the care of preschool children (1756), when the majority of Slovenian provinces were part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and ending with the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Then we will describe the current preschool education system, and in a separate chapter, we will present preschool teacher training from the beginning to the present. In the final chapter, we will introduce the Ciciban kindergarten, a PROROK project partner from Slovenia.

When we read and write about preschool education on a global scale, one of the most difficult challenges is common understanding and translating terms that have different meanings in different countries and languages. At the meetings with partners from all four countries involved in the PROROK project we spent a lot of time discussing this issue, but we did not come to any coordinated or unified solutions. As a result, the Slovenian project staff has decided to explain the terminology used in this introduction so that it will be understandable to the project collaborators and to the international public.

Early childhood and care (preschool education) (slo. *predšolska vzgoja*) refers to any regulated arrangement that provides education and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age (European Commission, 2022). We use this broad term to refer to organised education and care for preschool children in public or private institutions, as defined above. Some authors (e.g., Smith, 1996) advocate using the term "educare" for preschool rather than "education," emphasising that preschool education includes both care and education.

Kindergarten (slo. *vrtec*): “is an institution for the education and care of preschool children” (<https://fran.si/iskanje?View=1&Query=vrtec>). The word kindergarten comes from the German language. Kinder means children and garten means garden. The term dates back to the 19th century. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) started the first kindergarten, Garden of Children, in 1840 (<https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/why-is-kindergarten-called-kindergarten>).

Some project members believe that translating "kindergarten" as "preschool" would be more appropriate because it has a broader meaning. However, due to the tradition of using this term in the context of early childhood institutions in former socialist countries, we have retained the literal translation of the term "kindergarten" in the following text. We would like to add that in Slovenia the kindergarten is a preschool institution that provides full-day education and care for children from the end of maternity leave until they enter school, i.e., from 11 months to the age of six.

Preschool teacher (slo. *vzgojitelj/vzgojiteljica*): refers to a person who works in a preschool institution and has completed a three-year study programme for preschool education, i.e. acquired Level 6 qualification of the Qualifications Framework (180 ECTS) or Level 7, sublevel one, qualification of the Qualifications Framework (240 ECTS) for preschool education (European Commission, 2022). In this text, the term preschool teacher refers to individuals who worked in a kindergarten with preschool children in the past and now. After World War II preschool teachers in Slovenia lead kindergarten classes for preschool children of all ages, from the end of maternity leave till the child is entering the elementary school. Let us add that in Slovenia, preschool teachers look after children's safety and health, as well as educate them. Preschool teachers' education and role have evolved over time, as illustrated in our text below. "Preschool teacher" (slo. *vzgojitelj/vzgojiteljica*) could also be translated as "kindergarten teacher" but we chose the more commonly used term "preschool teacher."

Caregiver (slo. *varuh/varuhinja*): During the socialist era (in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), caregivers, who had to complete a one-year course in this field, worked with preschool teachers in kindergarten classes. As the following text demonstrates, there was a (problematic!) division between education and care at the time, with the caregiver in charge of »care« for children and other tasks (e.g., cleaning the room, toileting, and feeding the children), and the preschool teacher whose task was the education of preschool children.

Preschool teacher's assistant (slo. *pomočnik vzgojitelja*): following the renovation of the educational system in the independent Republic of Slovenia at the end of the 1990s, or according to new legislation (ZVrt, 1996, 2005), a preschool teacher's assistant works in each preschool class alongside the preschool teacher. A preschool teacher's assistant must finish a secondary professional programme in the field of preschool education, or he has to finish a one-year lasting vocational course for preschool after finishing other high school (ZVrt, 1996, 2005).

A significant difference from the past is that the preschool teacher and preschool teacher's assistant participate in educational work, as stated in the Kindergarten Act (ZVrt, 1996, 2005), "the work of a preschool teacher's assistant includes co-operation with the preschool teacher in planning, implementing, and preparing educational work in the class, as well as performing other tasks related to the kindergarten's activity."

2. The history of early childhood education in Slovenia

2.1 The political background

After the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy after World War I, most Slovenian territory was part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (since 1929: the Kingdom of Yugoslavia). Many Slovenian territories were annexed to other countries: Primorska to Italy, a large part of Carinthia to Austria and Porabje to Hungary.

The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was established shortly after World War II, in 1946, under the communist government of Marshal Tito. In 1963 it was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and consists of six socialist republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Serbia) and two autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina). The People's Republic of Slovenia was established in 1947, shortly after the creation of the new Yugoslavia. The 1963 constitution renamed it the Socialist Republic of Slovenia.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the European communist bloc, the SFRY began to disintegrate as a coherent political entity from 1991. This resulted in a series of conflicts in which most of the former country's constituent republics and autonomous provinces seceded and became independent states. In 1991, Slovenia gained its independence and became a democratic state Republic of Slovenia. In 2004, Slovenia became a member of the European Union (EU).

2.2 Preschools in Slovenia from the origin to the first world war

Pavlič (1991) writes that the first institutions for children in Slovenia were orphanages. The oldest mention of preschool care on Slovenian territory dates to 1756, when care for preschool children was organised in Maribor by Mrs. Magiskraut and her son. Zack (1911, in Pavlič, 1991, p. 31) wrote, "They taught children to sit quietly, to know the letters and to pray according to Catholic custom."

The first children's shelter/home was opened in Ljubljana in November 1834 and was intended for poor children between the ages of two and five. It was not financed by the municipality or the state; the home received all its funds through the voluntary contributions of wealthy citizens, and the parish priest took charge. Children who had working parents and "had shown a sense of Christian education, obedience, order and purity in the last six months" were admitted to the children's home (Pavlič, 1991, p. 33). There they were brought up and taught according to the following principles: religious education, respect for parents and superiors, and obedience. In the beginning, the children brought their own lunch from home, later they received a free lunch. In the following years, homes were also opened in other larger towns in Slovenia where care was prevalent.

After 1863, when the first private kindergarten¹⁾ was opened in Vienna, following Fröbel's example, preschools began to be systematically opened as educational institutions for preschool children on Slovenian territory as well, following Fröbel's example. In contrast to the children's homes, the preschools were intended for the chosen ones, the children from wealthier families (Dolanc, 1970). In 1869, the State Education Act came into force, prescribing a general eight-year compulsory education and, in additional regulations, also defining preschools as educational institutions supplementing family education (Dolanc, Levičnik, Kolar, Smasek and Glogovac, 1975, p. 3). According to data, there were nine preschools in Ljubljana, Klagenfurt, Trieste, Gorizia, Koper, and Piran, caring for just over a thousand children (Pavlič, 1991, p. 45). In 1872, three other government documents relevant to preschools were published: *The ministerial tender on preschools and similar institutions*, *The ministerial decree with regulations for preschools and similar institutions*, and *The instructions to school inspectorates regarding preschools*. These documents stated that the education of preschool children is an important part of "universal education" and that a favourable solution to the task of the public school depends on it" (Dolanc, 1970, p. 665).

Among the tasks mentioned are preparation for school with regular physical exercise, development of the senses and other suitable activities, and education without instruction in the school sense. Among other, the instructions to school supervisors required to pay attention to the true educational value of games, the extensive occupation of children, strict adherence to the principle of activities in all education and not only manual skills, the prevention of instruction in arithmetic, reading and writing, and strict school discipline, and to require as much outdoor exercise as possible, etc. (Dolanc, 1970, p. 667). The establishment of kindergartens should not depend only on charitable and religious organisations but should be supported by all residents and regional and especially school authorities (Pavlič, 1991, p. 46). The regulations also prescribed demanding conditions for the founders in terms of premises, equipment, and educational requirements of teaching staff, as well as education according to the principles of Fröbel. An important

1) In this chapter we will use the word kindergarten (which is a direct translation of the Slovenian word "vrtec") in the sense of early childhood education and care institutions.

change was that after 1872 kindergartens were intended for all children from the age of three, not only those from wealthy families (Dolanc, 1970, p. 665).

The principles set down in writing, however, were subordinated to the social order of the time. The provincial school authorities continued to leave the establishment of kindergartens to charitable and ecclesiastical organisations, associations and private individuals, who used them for their own interests: e.g. the Church for religious education, foreigners and their supporters for the introduction of German or Italian, and Slovene associations established Slovene kindergartens to prevent emigration ... Dolanc et al. (1975, p. 3) say that kindergarten education in the country during the end of 19th century was a means of class, religious and ethnic politics. Childcare facilities were provided for the children of workers, while upper class children attended the private kindergartens. Children under three were placed in 'crèches' and 'service institutions' which had no educational function (Dolanc, 1970, p. 666).

In 1894, when many preschool teachers had already been trained in the courses, the first Slovenian textbook (*Navod slovenski vrtnarici*), written by Kamušič (in Pavlič, 1991, p. 174–177), director of kindergartens in Trieste was published. In it he described the mental and physical development of children, wrote about the history and importance of the preschool, and presented the legal provisions. He believed that a preschool teacher should be able to arouse the child's interest in play, while allowing him to develop individually and play independently. He described Fröbel's method and suggested what the rooms and garden in kindergartens should look like. The kindergarten had to have a working plan, and the preschool teachers kept a file on each child, writing down his activities and his progress. In 1908, Škulj published instructions for kindergartens of the Society of St. Cyril and Methodius, which, according to Pavlič (1991, p. 178), do not differ much from those of Kamušič.

Some characteristics of the kindergartens of this period can be seen, for example, in the statute of the kindergarten in Idrija (1908, in Pavlič, 1991, p. 94, 95). The private kindergarten in Idrija for children from the age of three to six. It was run by Ursulines and was also based on Fröbel's method. It was intended to fulfil the following educational tasks: "Tasks that stimulate activity and thus educate the inclinations; games and physical exercises, stories and songs. All learning in the school sense was excluded." The number of children in the class should not exceed 40.

In 1912, Grmek, the preschool teacher in kindergartens in Trieste, wrote an article in which she substantiated the need for pre-school institutions and exposed the view that preschool benefits children (in Pavlič, 1991, p. 61–65). She also defended Fröbel's ideas but believed that "we, Slovenes, do not behave exactly according to Fröbel, and the main reason for this is – the money that we, Slovenes, miss the most". One teacher had 80 to 100 children in one class, and they lacked the space and materials conditions recommended by Fröbel. Nevertheless, Grmek believed

that the elementary school benefits from preschool education because it fosters the mental and physical development of the child. Preschool activities were visual and play based. According to her, the kindergarten is especially necessary for mothers with many children and mothers who are overburdened with work. She also writes that it was impossible to maintain discipline in the kindergarten due to the large number of children, the lack of space and because it would be tyrannical to require three-year-old children to sit quietly for three hours. Namely, schoolteachers most often complained about the discipline of children who were previously in kindergarten, but the author said that these children still have many good qualities and they can be very successful in life. Kindergarten in her opinion developed the sense of order, vigilance, and accuracy in children, as they learned through declamations, singing, physical exercises...

During the years of World War I, most kindergartens closed. During the war, shelters for orphans and children of working mothers were set up in refugee camps. Documents from kindergartens in the Primorska region show that learning Italian was an important part of the education of Slovenian children (Pavlič, 1991).

2.3 Slovenian kindergartens in prewar Yugoslavia

Pavlič (1991) says that the state did not take good care of kindergartens until the Second World War. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in Slovenian kindergartens there was no visible influence of the developmental psychology and pedagogy that were emerging in the world at that time. Progressive ideas and reflections can be found only in some pedagogical texts, while in practice rather poor material conditions prevailed. The author considers that the education and care of preschool children in the new state (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia since 1929) did not make significant progress and the state did not care much for the education of preschool teachers.

It is interesting to note, however, that the educational press was already discussing and writing about the problems that are still relevant today. Flere (1919), for example, defended the idea that the kindergarten and the school should constitute a unified system. Since some teachers considered the children who had previously attended kindergarten to be bad students, he concluded, "the elementary school does not want the childish children, but only the serious ones who want to work instead of play." He criticised the inflexibility of the school for failing to understand that the main purpose of the school is not instruction, but education. He also criticised the work in kindergartens, which were mainly 'employment centres' for children. He objected to the common practice of segregating poor children from children of higher classes in kindergartens. He also felt that in the unified system he proposed, the school should be closer to the kindergarten, for example, with more play, movement, and handicrafts. "The windows and doors of the school must be opened wide to allow life to enter it." (Flere, 1919). Finally, he de-

scribed Dewey's principles and his Chicago school and proposed that preschool and school gather in the method of children's self-activity.

A decade later, Doberšek (1929/30) wrote about the tasks of a kindergarten. He criticises the emphasis on memorising songs and declamations, which has "nothing to do with the nature of children," and considers children's performances "a devastating example of violence against the nature of God." He rejected products that were not the results of children's independent creation through play. He believed that too much emphasis is on form (products) and formality (e.g., polite behaviour). In kindergartens, children should be encouraged more to talk freely with each other in play, where children use their language skills in practice. According to him, the important task of kindergarten is "to lead a child who has become aware of his own identity to the basic rules in society, to judgement and moral consciousness between good and evil" (Doberšek, 1929/30) thus laying the foundation for character formation.

In 1929, ten years after the founding of the new state, the *National Education Act* was passed, moving school enrolment to age seven. Kindergartens, which were the part of the schools, accepted children aged four to seven, while younger children were placed in separate preschool institutions. There were also special whole day care institutions for over-two-year-old children of poor parents and full-time workers, from where older pre-school children were sent to nearby kindergartens for part of the day. In 1933, the Department of Education prescribed that preschool institutions must work according to the special programmes, that each child must have 6-8 cubic metres of space and that a group of 30 to 40 children must have at least two rooms, one for entertainment, the other for eating and rest. The caregivers with medical education (nurses) took care of the younger children up to four ages. Older preschool children were cared for and educated by pre-school teachers or school teachers, and the rest of the time by uneducated nannies who worked under the guidance of professional staff. Although the law prescribed the foundations for public kindergartens, the state education and social welfare authorities continued to leave their establishment to religious and charitable organisations and the private sector. Many working and peasant mothers left their children alone at home while working (Pavlič, 1991).

Data from the last year before the war (1939/40) show that there were 73 kindergartens with 115 preschool classes in Slovenia (Pavlič, 1991, p. 121). From the records of this period, we can conclude that a combination of Fröbel's and Montessori's methods prevailed in preschool education at that time (p. 120).

During World War II, Slovenian territory was divided between three occupiers, Germans, Italians, and Hungarians, who abolished Slovenian kindergartens and schools and established their own, where Slovenian children were taught by their educators in their language. The Germans created a wide network of kindergartens in which children were to be educated in the National Socialist spirit from an

early age. The youngest children in the occupied territories were at first illegally placed in family care. Under the auspices of the Communist Party and the Liberation Front, individuals, e.g., Ziherl in Ljubljana, illegally cared for orphans and children living only with their mothers.

2.4 Kindergartens in the socialist period from world war II to 1991

2.4.1 Building a unified system

Due to the rapid development of society after World War II and the changes that affected the family, especially when mothers started working, the need for early childhood education and care outside the family increased (Dolanc et al., 1975). Marjanović (1976) adds that in addition to these circumstances, the changes in Yugoslavia were also driven by general shifts in the conception of education.

After the war, the preschool institutions were placed under the Ministry of Social Policy, which organised a training course for preschool teachers from 1945 as part of the socio-political school. In the following year, pre-school institutions were placed under the Ministry of Education, and in the same year a one-year school for pre-school teachers was established at the Teacher Training College in the capital Ljubljana. The legal regulation of preschool institutions in the (new) Yugoslavia was enacted between 1948 and 1950. Dolanc et al. (1975) note that the laws allowed for the establishment of kindergartens by businesses, government agencies, and institutions. The preschool institutions, which included after-school care for school children, were renamed "play and work homes" (Pavlič, 1991). In them, children were cared for during the day and, for some, also at night (Dolanc, 1970, p. 674). In the 1949/50 school year, a four-year educational programme for preschool teachers²⁾ and a one-year programme for teacher's aides were introduced (Pavlič, 1991).

In 1961, the People's Assembly of the People's Republic of Slovenia adopted the *Resolution on the Responsibilities of the Municipality and the Residential Community in the Field of Child Care* (Dolanc et al., 1975). This meant the establishment of a unified system of early childhood education and care for all children of preschool age from the end of maternity leave until entry into compulsory school (at age seven). The resolution established the basic principles of education and care of children, the role of parents and other social actors, as well as unified management and coordination between them. Self-governing bodies were established in kindergartens to deal with organisational, financial, and curricular issues (Dolanc et al., 1975). In the mid-1960s, kindergartens began to organise occasional activities for preschool-age children in the community who were not enrolled in a kindergarten, and for school children in the community in the form of after-school care.

2) ISCED level 3.

In 1965/66, they also began to offer school preparation, which was not yet compulsory, as a separate programme (Dolanc, 1970). The *Law on the Education and Care of Preschool Children* was passed in 1971. According to this law, the role of early childhood education in kindergartens was to promote children's intellectual, personal, and physical development; to prepare children for enrolment in elementary school; to supervise children's nutrition, care, and health; and to cooperate with parents to coordinate the educational efforts of the family and kindergartens (Dolanc, 1970).

The 1970s were marked by concerted efforts to include as many children as possible in organised early childhood education. These efforts included accelerated construction of new facilities, often with the help of local voluntary taxes (Dolanc et al., 1975). Apart from the fact that education (including early childhood education) was seen as a public/government responsibility, the socialist government also encouraged mothers to take up full-time employment. It was argued that mass participation of women in politics and the economy was necessary for building socialism (Tomšič, 1976). To meet the needs of working mothers, local communities were seen as one of the most important expressions of human solidarity and reciprocity. Therefore, kindergartens were entrusted with the responsibility of providing social care, childcare and education that met contemporary needs. They were entrusted with the task of ensuring adequate and holistic care and education for children of pre-school and school age to promote their physical and mental development (Tomšič, 1976, p. 302). In 1974, almost ten times as many children (18.1% of all children of preschool age, i.e. children under the age of 7) attended kindergartens as in the first year after the war (Dolanc et al., 1975). Some school age children also attended kindergartens after school, but their numbers declined when elementary schools began to introduce daily extension programmes. Most preschool children who were not enrolled in kindergartens attended the one-year or short cycle programme to prepare for school (Dolanc et al., 1975). The percentage of children attending kindergarten increased significantly over the following decade. In 1980, 38.4% of all preschool age children attended kindergarten, and by 1989 the proportion had reached 52.3% (White Paper, 1995, p. 58). This expansion did not meet demand, and until the late 1980s there was a constant shortage of places for children whose parents wished to enrol them in pre-school. As a result, preference was given to children of single mothers and those who were deemed to be educationally, materially, and socially disadvantaged (Education and Care for Preschool Children Act, 1971, Art. 27).

According to the *Preschool Education and Care Act* (1980, Art. 23), public kindergartens (private kindergartens were not allowed) provided education and care for preschool-age children in full-day care (five full days a week), except for a few who attended only the compulsory one-year preparation for school (part of the day and only a few days a week). Kindergartens opened early in the morning (at 5am) and closed in the late afternoon (around 5pm). Kindergartens could also arrange day care for children aged up to three in the childminder's home and offer various

other forms of educational work outside the home. These arrangements provided working parents with the flexibility to place their children in kindergarten. In 1979, *Educational Programme for Education and Care of Preschool Children* (hereinafter referred to as *Educational Programme*, 1979) was adopted, the first programme for early childhood education at the national level, which introduced a binding and uniform curriculum and didactic basis for preschool work throughout the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. As in schools, children were divided into age-appropriate classes to maintain the uniform curriculum, although children aged two to six could also be divided into mixed-age classes (*Educational Programme*, 1979, Art. 29). In addition, kindergartens had remedial classes for children with severe developmental disabilities (Art. 30).

As in other socialist countries, policies in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia have actively promoted the employment of women. As a result, and due to the tendency to provide coordinated education as early as possible, which promoted the 'ruling ideology', several features can be identified that were typical of Slovenian early childhood education. These included an intensive formation of kindergarten networks, a unified and centralised system of early childhood education that did not allow for private kindergartens or a plurality of approaches, and public responsibility and financing of kindergartens that allowed for wide availability of kindergartens regardless of the financial situation of families.

Compared to most European countries³⁾ Slovenia had (and still has) a uniform preschool system for all children of preschool age between the end of maternity leave and the beginning of primary school. At the state level, many EU countries distinguish between pre-school care for children up to the age of three or four (usually under the auspices of the Ministry of Health or Social Welfare) and care for children above this age, referred to as 'education' (Moss, 1994, p. 8). Currently, experts are clearly in favour of merging the two systems into unified preschools (e.g., *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities*, 2009, p. 125). Therefore, one of the main advantages or strengths that the socialist period brought to early childhood education in Slovenia is clearly the unified system of kindergartens.

Apart from the demand that education should follow ideology, socialist countries also expressed the conviction – progressive even from today's point of view⁴⁾ – that children and their education are not only the private matter of parents, but also an important value and concern for all members of society (Tomšič, 1976; Bergant, 1981). A positive consequence of this idea was the organisation of education

3) According to the report *Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe: Tackling Social and Cultural Inequalities* (2009: 10), only the Nordic countries (except Denmark), Latvia and Slovenia currently have uniform systems of pre-school education and care in the EU, covering children from the age of one to school age.

4) Moss (in Kroflič, 2011, p. 19) criticises Anglo-American neoliberalism in which early childhood education is still often framed as a market with private provision and as a business. Such a way of thinking is exactly the opposite of the idea we can find in the Nordic countries and in Slovenia also: that education is seen as a public good that must include all children and their families.

in local communities, which was to consider the needs and wishes of families on the basis of solidarity and cooperation of parents in decision-making (Tomšič, 1976, p. 96).

2.4.2 The socialist pedagogical concept in Slovenian kindergartens

If we analyse the prevailing educational concept in the socialist period, we can say that the basic ideas or doctrine were maintained until the late 1980s. After the introduction of the Educational Programme, preschool education became even more structured and pre-planned, while consideration of individual differences was largely ignored. However, the pedagogical concept underlying the *Educational Programme* (1979) had already been developed in the 1960s. Dolanc et al. (1975, p. 9–10) list the following foundations of this pedagogical concept for early childhood education:

- a natural, friendly, and relaxed atmosphere with a warm relationship between the preschool teacher and the child,
- the greatest possible activation of the child by alternating between guided and spontaneous, individual and group activities,
- the emphasis on the child's play and creativity,
- integration of educational areas.

The substantive areas of early childhood education consisted of the physical, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic education of children. In the 1960s, the areas of intellectual education included 'language development' and 'learning about the natural and social environment' by authors such as Kolar et al. (1969). In the *Educational Programme* (1979) the same areas were retained, but to the area of intellectual development were added the new areas of 'work and technical education' and 'development of basic mathematical concepts and ideas'. The latter is an area most influenced by Piaget's theory and the ideas of the American compensatory programmes. In the educational programme, the aims and objectives of early childhood education were elaborated in detail for each age group and educational area.

The question arises to what extent the above principles (Dolanc et al., 1975, p. 10) were implemented in the kindergartens of the time. While play was presented in the curriculum as the main activity of the preschool child, in practice the emphasis was on activities planned and led by the preschool teacher. In the 1960s and 1970s, activities and tasks were divided into those based on the individual wishes of the children and common tasks suggested by the preschool teacher in which the children participated "collectively and compulsorily in the older age groups" (Kolar et al., 1969, p. 41). In the *Educational Programme* (1979, p. 14), work tasks and free play were added to activities based on children's individual wishes and guided tasks.

The starting point mentioned earlier that early childhood education should ensure that children were as activated as possible (Dolanc et al., 1975, p. 9), referred primarily to the concern that children should have something to do most of the time. Great importance was attached to the planning of educational work. Kolar et al. (1969) state that preparation for group tasks should include psychological, content, and methodological preparation adapted to the specifics of the children's ages, as well as to the specifics of time, space, and differences between children (Kolar et al., 1969, p. 52).

While preschool teachers planned and selected activities on their own until the introduction of the *Educational Programme* (1979) specified the content and activities for the different age groups and activity areas. As a result, educational work was planned by teachers at different levels: annually, for each period (introductory period, three three-month trimesters, and summer period), weekly, and they also had to write daily plans. The plans for the three-month terms were prepared jointly by the teachers in regional working groups and specified content and goals in even more detail than the prescribed educational programme (Batistič Zorec, 2003). Thus, a teacher had few opportunities to consider the differences between environments and children. Providing the same or "equal" education became more important than addressing individual differences in children's abilities, needs, and interests.

Activities based on children's individual desires were basically not very different from guided tasks. Kolar et al. (1969) write that children were free to choose an activity or materials at their assigned time in the daily schedule (e.g., in the morning or after naptime).

However, the children's free choice was dominated by the preschool teacher, who "directed the children's activities by distributing appropriate materials in the playroom and making them available to the children" (Ibid., p. 43). They add that the teachers also "individualised tasks to develop the child's need and ability to use free time while preventing idleness" (Ibid., p. 43). The *Educational Programme* (1979) barely mentions these activities, which followed children's individual desires, as all attention was focused on targeted tasks in line with educational areas and age groups. At least until the mid-1980s, the principle described by Kolar et al. (1969) was still in effect in kindergartens. Preschool teachers prepared a selection of activities from which children could choose, but children could not simply acquire any toy or material they wanted or that had not been planned and prepared for them in advance. The playrooms were also arranged so that most toys and materials could be stored in cupboards out of the children's reach, except for toys in a few fixed play corners.

From this political framework it is evident that the pedagogical concept in Slovenian kindergartens during socialism was influenced by the official socialist values. These socialist values included the development of work habits from a young age

and the preference of the collective over the individual. The content and methods of educational work in kindergartens introduced by the *Educational Programme* (1979) were prescribed by experts and were highly structured, so that the autonomy of teachers was very limited. However, contemporary trends in early education that went beyond the socialist context can be identified, such as age and developmental appropriateness, preparation for reading and writing, and the development of early mathematical concepts.

Research by De Batistič (1990) shows that the Slovenian system of early childhood education was centralised and hierarchical until the 1980s. There was no question of preschool teachers' autonomy, and one of the main tasks of the pedagogical management was to supervise and guide the preschool teachers. The support staff (preschool teachers' aides) was at the bottom of the hierarchy. The preschool teachers not only gave them direct instructions, but also planned the daily tasks for them. As a result, the actions of most preschool teachers were very similar, and many routines were copied from each other without questioning their purpose. The division of work into "educational" and "supervisory" tasks in the preschool classes was evident. The preschool teacher planned and carried out primarily the so-called directed tasks; the tasks of the preschool teacher's aides were hygiene, childcare and occasionally disciplining the children.⁵⁾ Such a division meant that education was understood to be a fully deliberate and planned process, carried out by the preschool teacher who imparted knowledge and values to the children, taught them good manners, etc. It was also assumed that children could merely be 'looked after', put to bed, cared for, provided with toys, etc., without this having any educational effect on them. Early childhood education throughout the socialist period was also characterised by an emphasis on health and hygiene requirements.⁶⁾

3. Democratisation of preschool system in independent Slovenia

After Slovenia gained independence following the fall of the socialist regime in 1991, the country introduced major reforms of early childhood education. In this period, many Slovenian educators and professionals were well aware of the need to preserve the advantages of the relatively high quality kindergartens from the socialist period. At the same time, however, they were very critical of the

5) Although preschool teachers and preschool teacher's aides had different levels of education, the teacher's aides communicated with the children while caring for them, implying that they had an impact on the children's learning and development. Care and education cannot be separated! Some authors (e.g. Smith, 1993) emphasise this point by using the word "educare." Because of this, the new legislation and curriculum (Curriculum for Kindergartens, 1999) highlights collaboration in the educational process between preschool teachers and preschool teacher's assistants.

6) Until the Kindergartens Act of 1996, educators could attend high school (5 years, later 4 years). College was not established until the mid-1980s at the Faculty of Education, and the 3-year higher professional program was first introduced in 1995–1996.

pedagogical concept of the period, which was not in the line with the professional trends in the world. In the proposed reforms, the *Public Preschool Institutions section of the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia* (hereafter referred to as *White Paper*, 1996) aimed to identify and retain the positive elements of the existing system and its conceptualisation of education and offered various ways of replacing those aspects which prevented or impeded an increase in the quality of early childhood education. It considered the recommendations of the Council of Europe and other international organisations, features of educational programmes and developmental trends in this field as well as developments of the social sciences and humanities influencing early childhood education.

Preschool education in Slovenia is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports and is regulated by two acts: The *Kindergartens Act* (1996, 2005, hereinafter ZVrt) and The *Act on the Organization and Financing of Education* (1996, 2007, hereinafter ZOFVI). The *Law on Organization and Financing of Education* regulates the conditions of implementation and determines the way of management and financing in all areas of education, while the *Law on Kindergartens* regulates preschool education in public and private kindergartens (task of kindergartens, goals and principles, a number of possible programmes in kindergartens, financing, conditions for training of professionals, work responsibilities of the preschool teacher and the preschool teacher's assistant, collection and protection of personal data in kindergartens, etc.) (Devjak, 2018). Thus, organised preschool education and care takes place in public and private kindergartens, and parents have the right to choose the programme of preschool education in a public or private kindergarten according to Art. 9 of the *Kindergartens Act* (1996, 2005). For children who cannot be enrolled in kindergarten due to illness, preschool education can also take place in the child's home (ibid.). Thus, legislation provides the legal basis for the establishment of public and private kindergartens.

A public kindergarten may be established as a public educational institution or organised as an organisational unit of a public educational or other institution or other legal entity under public law. Thus, a kindergarten is a legal entity, unless otherwise provided by law or the law establishing it (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Art. 7). Public kindergartens are established by local communities, municipalities. As a legal entity, the kindergarten must first be registered in the court register and then in the register of providers of publicly valid educational programmes, which is maintained by the above-mentioned Ministry. The application for registration in the register is submitted by the local municipality – the founder of the public kindergarten or kindergartens (Devjak, 2018). In order to carry out the activity of care and education, public kindergartens and schools shall have professional staff with the necessary training and such premises and equipment as may be determined by the Minister or the Board authorised by law (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Art. 33). Kindergartens may start the activity of care and education after being registered in a register kept by the Ministry of Education and Sport (ibid., Art. 34). A public kindergarten may be established after ensuring that it has at least 10 preschool classes (ibid., Art. 44).

Depending on duration, kindergartens can run daily programmes (6 to 9 hours, morning, afternoon, full day, or alternating); half-day programmes (4 to 6 hours, morning, afternoon, or alternating); and shorter programmes (240 to 600 hours per year) for children from remote and demographically disadvantaged locations. Daily and half-day programmes are for children from age 1 to school entry and include education, care, and nutrition, whereas shorter programmes apply only to children 3 years of age and older and include education, care, and child nutrition (ZVrt, 1996, 2005, Art. 14).

Healthy meals are very important during the preschool years, not only because of development and growth, but also because of acquired eating habits. Menu planning is based on the *Guidelines for Healthy Eating in Educational Institutions* (2005) and the *Practicum of Healthy Eating Menus in Educational Institutions* (2008). Efforts focus on planning high-quality menus that include all recommended food groups and incorporate organic and locally grown foods.

According to the *Curriculum for Kindergartens* (1999), children are divided into two age groups: the first (from 1 to 3 years) and the second (from 3 to 6 years) (also Art. 15). Educational work is carried out in homogeneous (admitted children are in the age range of one year), heterogeneous (admitted children are from the first or second age groups), and combined classes (admitted children are from the first and second age groups combined) (*ibid.*, Art. 16). The day and half-day programme are implemented jointly by preschool teachers and preschool teacher's assistants, and the shorter programme can be implemented by preschool teachers (*ibid.*). A preschool may also organise family care and education for preschool children, which takes place at home of the caregiver and may be implemented by a preschool teacher or preschool teacher's assistant (*i.e.*, Art. 18). However, as mentioned above, preschool education for children who cannot be enrolled in kindergarten due to illness can also be organised as so-called preschool education at home, which is also provided by properly trained preschool teachers or preschool teacher's assistants (*i.e.*, Art. 19, Devjak, 2018).

Public kindergartens also conduct preschool education for children with special needs in accordance with the *Programme for Preschool Children with Adapted Implementation and Additional Professional Support* (Law on Care for Children with Special Needs, 1996, 2011, hereinafter ZUOPP, Art. 18). Preschool education is provided with additional professional support as assistance in overcoming deficits, disorders, or as a counselling service (*i.e.*, Art. 8), provided individually or jointly in a preschool class or outside the preschool class in an educational or social institution. Preschool children may be guaranteed the right to counselling services as additional professional support prior to the initiation of the counselling process, up to a maximum of two hours per month, upon the suggestion of a physician (*i.e.*, Art. 9). In individual programmes for preschool children with special needs, the content, organisation, and methods of implementation are adapted (*i.e.*, Art. 11). In addition to adapted implementation, the care and education of children with spe-

cial needs may also be provided according to a tailored programme for preschool children (i.e., Art. 5), implemented by public kindergartens in special developmental preschool classes, units of preschools established or organised for the implementation of these programmes, public institutions for the care and education of children with special needs, and public social welfare institutions (ibid., Art. 18). In 2019, the *Law on Integrated Early Treatment of Children with Special Needs of Preschool Age* came into force. It regulates the integrated early treatment of children with special needs and children with risk factors of preschool age, as well as the scope of treatment of children and their families of preschool age. It ensures and promotes the development of the child, strengthens the capacity of the family, and promotes the social integration of the family and the child (ZOPOPP, 2019, Art. 1). Comprehensive early treatment of children with special needs and children with preschool-age risk factors (hereinafter: early treatment) under this law is based on the following goals and principles:

- Ensuring the best interests of the child and promoting the child's development and reducing the potential for the development of permanent special needs,
- providing all information to parents, foster parents or legal representatives (hereinafter: parents),
- early identification of children with special needs and children with risk factors,
- psychosocial support for parents at the birth of a child, in health care facilities, kindergartens and preschool classes in institutions for the education of children and adolescents with special needs and in social welfare institutions,
- an expert assessment of the child's abilities and special needs,
- an individualised approach to supporting children and families,
- the involvement of professionals and parents in the creation of an individualised family support plan,
- the provision of comprehensive health care for the child,
- the provision of comprehensive and coordinated assistance to children and families,
- autonomy, professionalism, and responsibility of professionals working with children and families,
- informing parents about the child's treatment and progress and strengthening parents' self-confidence, co-creating their active role and thus strengthening families' ability to care for the child,
- raising awareness among professionals and the public about the need for comprehensive early treatment of preschool children (Art. 2).

Preschool children with special needs and children at risk (hereinafter: children) may be identified in the family, in the health system in the context of the implementation of preventive health measures at the primary level or examinations in this framework and other treatments in kindergarten, in an educational institution, in a social welfare institution or in the context of the services of social work centres (ibid., Art. 5). Programmes for preschool children and adapted programmes for

preschool children with special needs are recognized by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Art. 25).

Public kindergartens apply a publicly valid programme *Curriculum for Kindergartens* (1999). It is designed primarily for daily programmes, but at the same time (considering the specifics) it forms the professional basis for the work in other programmes (half-day, short-term, educational care, home education). The concept of curriculum was introduced because it is "broader and more comprehensive than the concept of programme, and it also entails a shift from the traditional emphasis on content to an emphasis on the process of preschool education, the totality of interactions and experiences from which the child learns in kindergarten" (*Curriculum for Kindergartens*, 1999, p. 7). It includes the goals and the principles derived from it, the basic knowledge about children's development and learning, and the global and specific goals for individual educational areas. For transparency and professional clarity, it is divided into 6 thematic areas – movement, language, art, society, nature, and mathematics – with activities in each area being interdisciplinary. Inter-curricular activities, such as moral development, health care, safety, traffic education, connect all the areas. The proposed contents and objectives are set separately for the first (1–3 years) and the second (3 to 6 years old children) age groups. The possible ways and means of achieving the objectives are proposed but not obligatory. The preschool teacher is the one who "uses professional judgement to decide what, when, and how" (Devjak, 2018, p. 8).

Private kindergartens may be established by domestic or foreign legal entities or individuals. In addition, a private kindergarten must first be registered as a legal entity in the court registry and then in a registry of providers of publicly valid educational programmes maintained by the above-mentioned Ministry. The application for registration in the file is submitted by the private kindergarten itself (*Preschool Education*, 2016). Private kindergartens differ from public kindergartens in their programmes. The programme of a private kindergarten is determined by the founder of the kindergarten based on Art. 13 of the *Kindergartens Act* (1996, 2005), and he can also decide on the programme of public kindergartens. Before a private kindergarten opens, it must obtain a positive opinion of the General Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education on the appropriateness of the programme. Private kindergartens that implement the programmes according to certain pedagogical principles (Steiner, Decroly, Montessori, and similar) receive a positive opinion from the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education⁷ if it determines that the programme has been recognized by a relevant international association (*ibid.*). Like a public kindergarten, a private kindergarten can begin its activities only after it has been entered in the Ministry's register.

7) The Government of the Republic of Slovenia, at its meeting on May 16, 1996, established the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education to decide on professional issues in the field of general education and to provide professional assistance in decision-making and in the preparation of regulations.

To be entered in the register, proof must be provided that the prescribed conditions for specialised personnel, space and equipment have been met (ibid). Private kindergartens have to provide the same staff qualifications as public kindergartens.

However, if the need for preschool education suggests, the municipality may also grant a concession to a private kindergarten to run a programme that is valid for the public (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Art. 73). The granting of a concession means that a private kindergarten performs a public service and has the same programme as a public kindergarten. A special concession contract specifies the amount of funds that the municipality provides to the kindergarten (i.e., paragraphs 74 and 75). Private kindergartens with a concession are part of a public network organised for the provision of public services in the field of education (see also Art. 11). Private kindergartens without a concession may receive the right to funding from the municipal budget if they run at least a half-day programme, if they have at least one preschool room, if they have employees or otherwise provide preschool teachers and preschool teacher's assistants to run the programme in accordance with the law and other regulations, and if they are accessible to all children (ZVrt, 1996, Art. 34).

3.1 Linguistic background

3.1.1 First language: Slovene

Slovene is a fully developed and functionally diverse modern South Slav language, located spatially where the Slavic, Romance, Germanic and Finno-Ugric language groups meet. It is the state language of the Republic of Slovenia and one of the official languages of the European Union. There are written examples of Slovene dating back over a thousand years. Throughout history the language has contributed – as it still does today – to the preservation of the Slovene people as a nation, playing a national unifying role: it is seen as the nation's first and most fundamental identifying and cultural characteristic. It is now spoken as a mother tongue by about 2,200,000 people, mainly in the Republic of Slovenia, but also a significant number (about 500,000) in border areas of neighbouring countries and around the world. As Slovene is most similar to its fellow Slavic language Slovak, and as their names are similar (slovenščina and slovenčina), they are sometimes confused. We would therefore like to show you, through an outline of its historical development and its legal and social position, as well as of some important grammatical elements, that Slovene is not Slovak and that it is, like Slovak, Portuguese and Dutch, and many other languages, a modern European language (Kalin Golob, Gliha Komac, Logar, 2008, p. 7).

On 25th June 1991 Slovene became the official language of the Republic of Slovenia. Its formal status is determined by Art. 11 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia*: "The official language in Slovenia is Slovene. In those municipalities where Italian or Hungarian national communities reside, Italian or Hungarian shall also be

official languages.” Since 2004, the basic rules on the public use of Slovene as the official language of the Republic of Slovenia have been determined by the *Public Use of the Slovene Language Act* (Kalin Golob, Gliha Komac, Logar, 2008, p. 21).

3.1.2 Second language: Language communities in Slovenia

Art. 64 and art. 80 of the *Constitution* define the special language rights enjoyed by the Italian national community in Slovene Istria and the Hungarian national community in part of Prekmurje, while the status and rights of the Roma community are determined by Art. 65 and by the *Basic Roma Community Act* passed on 28th April 2007. Compulsory education is also organised in line with this legislative framework (Kalin Golob, Gliha Komac, Logar, 2008, p. 22).

Educational work in kindergartens is conducted in Slovenian. Children in kindergartens where the educational work is carried out in the Slovene language are introduced to the Italian language, and children in kindergartens where the educational work is carried out in the Italian language are introduced to the Slovene language, according to a special law, in areas where members of the Slovene nation and members of the Italian national community live and are defined as ethnically mixed areas. Educational work is conducted bilingually, in Slovene and Hungarian, in areas where members of the Slovene and Hungarian ethnic communities live, in accordance with a special law (ZVRT, 1996, Art. 5, p. 2).

Members of other language communities live in Slovenia as well, and they frequently join together in various societies concerned with the preservation and development of their language. They are from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, North Macedonia, Croatia, the Russian Federation, Bulgaria, and Italy, among other places. Ukraine, China (Slovenija od 1991 do danes, pregled statističnih podatkov, 2021, p. 54), which is why special attention should be paid to children whose first language is not Slovene, so that they can compensate for any gaps in their Slovene knowledge (Curriculum for Kindergartens, 1999, p. 4).

3.1.3 Foreign language: English

There are several European documents that promote language diversity: *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity: action plan 2004-2006 (2005)*, *From linguistic diversity to plurilingual education: Guide for the Development of Language Education Policies in Europe (2007)*, and *Official Journal of the European Union: COUNCIL RESOLUTION of 21 November 2008 on a European strategy for multilingualism*.

Foreign languages are not defined as a specific task in the *Curriculum for Kindergartens*, but are only mentioned in relation to national minorities and the autoch-

thonous Roma minority (Curriculum for Kindergartens, 1999, p. 4). Kindergarten should also offer foreign language instruction as an additional option; foreign languages should be taught during kindergarten by appropriately trained professionals. For this purpose, children are placed in groups of appropriate size so that they learn the language according to the principles of the communicative model. Parents decide on the admission of their children on the basis of the specialised information provided in the kindergarten. Additional foreign language instruction is provided for children in the last year before school enrolment. One foreign language is taught in kindergartens, usually English (White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 2011, p. 89).

Early learning of a foreign language has a positive impact on children's overall cognitive development, e.g., divergent and flexible thinking, metalinguistic awareness, fluency, social cognition, positive self-concept, more frequent and quality social interactions (Marjanovič Umek, 2008).

Integrated foreign language learning should enable children to learn naturally and in context, learn thematically in connection with all areas of the kindergarten curriculum (movement, art, nature, mathematics, society). In their work, practitioners take into account the goals and principles of the *Curriculum for Kindergartens* (1999) and build on the findings of developmental psychology and modern methods of language learning in early childhood (Fras Berro, 2016, p. 13).

3.1.4 Sign language

Preschool teachers and preschool teacher assistants must carefully observe the child and be able to recognise the child's nonverbal style, which may include sign language (deaf, deaf-mute, and deaf-blind children use a differently developed system of nonverbal means than hearing children who reach the apexes) (Curriculum for Kindergartens, 1999, p. 22).

4. Preschool teacher's training in Slovenia

4.1 Before the World War II

In the time when Slovenia was a part of Austro-Hungarian Empire, the first preschool teacher school was established in Vienna in 1868, and following schools were established across the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Pavlič, 1991, p. 163). Unlike the teaching profession, which was only gradually feminised, preschool teaching was traditionally reserved for women (Dolanc et al., 1975).

The Austrian school constitution of 1805 required teachers to obtain permission from the provincial school authorities to open schools or kindergartens, and a government decree issued three years later required them to have a teaching practice. Until 1869, however, there were no public schools or courses to train preschool teachers and schoolteachers in Slovenia; all that was required was to pass the exam and demonstrate their ability to perform in the class. Most girls prepared for the exam in a year-long course taught by nuns. By this time there were quite several schools for women teachers throughout Europe, while schools for preschool teachers were not established until much later. According to the law of 1872, at least two years of practice was required for management of the kindergarten (Pavlič, 1991, p. 164). In 1883, Gorizia Sloga Association, which promoted the Slovene language in schools and kindergartens, established a special course for kindergarten management at a teachers' school (Pavlič, 1991, p. 56). Frankova was the first Slovene preschool teacher who finished this course. Later she taught preschool teachers in courses prepared by the Ljubljana Teachers' School. At the beginning of the century, preschool teachers were demanded a minimum of two-year lasting education (Pavlič, 1992, p. 166).

In the 70s of the 19th century, private associations educated preschool teachers. In Trieste, the first such course was held to introduce preschool teachers to the Froebli's method. Professors from the teachers' school, teachers from the girls' school, and preschool teachers led the course (Pavlič, 1991, p. 163).

Preschool teachers had to meet the following requirements, they: shall not have been punished or be the subject of criminal proceedings, be at least 24 years old, have a "maturity certificate for communal elementary schools," and have spent at least three months in a preschool learning about the duties of a preschool teacher. Candidates who met all the requirements were given the authority to manage the kindergarten on their own. School officials regulated preschool activities (Maglica, 2005, p. 51).

In 1887, the first preschool teachers took the professional exam. Girls who were older than 16 might enrol in the course. They needed to have an ear for music, love children, and stand in for the mother's love. They were to study the child's character and soul. The school administration presented a certificate of graduation. No certificate could be issued without the presence of a government representative at the exam. *The Instruction for the Slovenian Preschool Teacher* (Kamušič, 1894), the first book about preschool education in Slovenia, makes reference to a preparatory course for preschool teachers that is taught at public teacher training institutions or in specific courses at these institutions. The instruction also referred to the staff of kindergarten, which included a leader who directed and supervised the activities of other employees, such as preschool teachers and maids. Each preschool teacher could supervise up to 40 children. In the same document there were also the preschool teacher's duties or "schedule of duties," the duties of the kindergarten manager, the caregiver's duties, and the protocol (Maglica, 2005, p. 53).

In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 429 girls had passed the professional exam for preschool teachers by 1926 according to statistics. The 1929 law did not require the establishment of a kindergarten programme. As a result, the Ministry of Education issued an ordinance on the educational programme for Yugoslav kindergartens. The *National Education Law* of 1934 established regulations for the practical examination of preschool teachers. The practical exam included a practical training of preschool teachers to be in a kindergarten, followed by a written theoretical part. The Ministry of Education issued regulations for preschool teacher training shortly before World War II. It entailed the implementation of regular courses at teacher education colleges (Pavlič, 1991, p. 163).

4.2 After the World War II

After World War II Slovenia became a part of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (later Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). As part of the socio-political school conducting training courses for preschool teachers began in 1945. The courses enrolled 33 candidates. In 1946, a one-year school for preschool teachers was established in Ljubljana. During the school year 1950 a **four-year professional school for preschool teachers**, a one-year school for preschool caregivers and a five-month course for support educational staff were established in Ljubljana (Pavlič, 1991, p. 173).

The kindergarten staff requirements were specified in the 1950 Decree on the Organization and Work of Kindergartens (Maglica, 2005). The kindergarten staff included an administrator, preschool teacher, an economist, support staff, a doctor, and a nurse. The Ministry of Education supplied the required number of preschool teachers. They had to do a medical exam before starting their new jobs. Each preschool was led by a director, and the children were divided according to their age into two groups led by two preschool teachers (Maglica, 2005, p. 56).

Preschool education made modest progress between 1950 and 1960. Caregivers who had completed one year of training worked in the nursery. Between 1961 and 1972, secondary schools for preschool education were established in Ljubljana, Koper, Celje and Idrija. In 1965/66, school preparatory classes for children aged 6 began (Devjak, Skubic, Polak, Kolšek, 2012).

In the 1970s and 1980s, preschool teachers with a secondary education (4- or 5-year high school) and caregivers (a one-year training program for caregivers) worked in the kindergarten, while paediatric nurses could only work as preschool teachers in kindergarten classes up to 2 years old (nursery). In the school preparation class, a preschool or class teacher could work. According to the law from 1980, a caregiver worked half-time in addition to the teacher in kindergarten classes from 2 to 7 years old, and both worked full-time in kindergarten classes up to two years old (Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji, 1995).

Although a secondary school education was sufficient for the work of a preschool teacher in a preschool until 1992 (Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji, 1995), preschool teachers could begin training in the two-year post-secondary program Preschool Teacher at the Pedagogical Academy in Ljubljana in 1984. In the first year, only part-time studies were available, but beginning with the 1985/86 academic year, full-time studies were also available. 667 students graduated from the Department of Preschool Education of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana between the introduction of post-secondary studies and the end of 1994, when a three-year higher education professional programme in preschool education was introduced (De Batistič, 1995). Since 1989, the University of Maribor has also offered a post-secondary program in preschool education (50 let Pedagoške fakultete UM, 2011).

4.3 In the independent republic of Slovenia

After Slovenia gained independence, the whole educational system was renewed. According to the Kindergarten Act (ZVrt, 1996, Art. 40), educational activities in public kindergartens are carried out by preschool teachers, preschool teacher's assistants, consultants, health and hygiene regime organisers, meal organisers, and others. Preschool teachers must have a post-secondary or higher professional education in the field. A secondary school diploma in preschool education or another secondary school diploma, as well as a successfully completed (one-year) professional course in preschool education, are required for teacher's assistants.

Following the December 1993 adoption of the Act on Higher Education, which abolished two-year higher education study programs, the Department of Preschool Education of the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana developed a new three-year high professional program Preschool Education, which was accepted and approved by the Council of the Republic of Slovenia for Higher Education in February 1995. The goal of the educational program renovation was to improve the quality of education for preschool teachers and increase the share of practice, which we were significantly behind in comparison to similar programs in Europe and around the world. The first call for full-time and part-time studies under the new program, which was implemented in the academic year 1995/96, was published in March 1995. The program's goal was to train preschool teachers to provide high-quality educational work to young children. Preschool teachers with a bachelor's degree can work in preschools, elementary schools' new first grade, and other kindergarten settings (De Batistič, 1995).

Knowledge that preschool teachers should gain from this programme (De Batistič, 1995):

- about children and education: different conceptions of childhood and education throughout history, different theories about the development and learning

of preschool children. It is concerned with pedagogical special knowledge (education theory, preschool pedagogy, and didactics), psychology (developmental and pedagogical psychology), sociology, philosophy, special pedagogy, and health education.

- theoretical and practical knowledge from various educational disciplines (language, social environment, natural science, mathematics, movement, dance, music, and art). The foundation is extensive "subject" knowledge that the educator will impart to the students. The improvement is in the methodology (special didactics of the subjects), which is concerned with the methods and forms of imparting this knowledge to preschool children of various ages. The listed areas are related in terms of content (course curricula) as well as implementation (area integration in educational work).
- concerning the childcare system (school system, public and private kindergartens, legal, social and health institutions). It is critical that the educator is aware of the services provided by various institutions aimed at assisting families and preschool children, as well as how to contact them. This knowledge should be linked to a critical analysis of the functioning and relationships in these institutions. In addition to the foregoing, knowledge of the child's rights is essential.
- communication with children and adults: oral communication, reading and written expression, non-verbal communication, and artistic expression. The student should learn to talk (dialogue, group discussion) and freely narrate (rhetoric), adapt his narration to the audience (children of different ages, parents with different educations, laymen and experts...), listen and consider the opinions of others. Students should be trained for independent study of professional literature (understanding, critical analysis and evaluation and comparison with other sources) and for writing professional texts.
- scientific critical thinking: the ability of analytical thinking and mental synthesis, as well as the ability to argue professionally and critically.

Following a change in higher education legislation in 2004, the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana decided to completely renovate studies at all three levels (undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral studies) in accordance with the Bologna process guidelines. Among the important goals of the aforementioned renovation were the transformation of subjects and curricula, as well as alignment with ECTS principles and the promotion of mobility and international cooperation (Vloga za pridobitev soglasja k študijskemu programu predšolska vzgoja PEF UL, 2007).

The main goal of the Bologna preschool education program is to prepare students for high-quality educational work with toddlers, children in early childhood, and children in the first grade of a nine-year primary school (Zakon o osnovni šoli, 1996), as well as collaboration with their parents, colleagues, and other professionals. Throughout the educational process, students become acquainted with various conceptions of childhood and education, as well as basic theoretical and practical knowledge in specific areas of activity in kindergarten (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999).

Graduates must be able to communicate with children and adults, as well as plan, implement, and critically analyse educational work. The elective subjects in the program encourage students to receive more in-depth training in areas of pre-school work in which they have a particular interest and ability. An important goal of the study is the acquisition of basic and broadly transferable knowledge, which will enable graduates to search for resources and ways to acquire the specific knowledge and skills they need at work through the process of lifelong learning (Vloga za pridobitev soglasja k študijskemu programu predšolska vzgoja PEF UL, 2007).

The curriculum of the undergraduate study programme includes (Vloga za pridobitev soglasja k študijskemu programu predšolska vzgoja PEF UL, 2007):

- 11 courses of basic pedagogical studies, comprising 67 ECTS (37.2%),
- 13 professional subjects (fields of activities in preschool), comprising 75 ECTS (41.7%),
- 2 elective subjects of the profession, comprising 8 ECTS (4.4%),
- 3 faculty elective subjects in the amount of 12 ECTS (6.7%),
- 3 units of continuous practice in the scope of 12 ECTS (6.7%) of the entire program,
- thesis or project comprising 6 ECTS (3.3%).

The Faculty of Education in Ljubljana began implementing the Bologna advanced professional program in preschool education in the 2009/10 academic year, following successful accreditation. A two-year postgraduate programme in preschool education as part of the Bologna renovation was developed, allowing preschool teachers to continue their academic and professional careers. The first stage of study prepares graduates for employment, while the second and third stages develop research, leadership, and connecting competencies, as well as reflective practice competencies.

The Faculty of Education in Ljubljana has offered a master's program in Early Childhood Education since 2010, with the overall goal of professionalising early childhood education and raising the level and quality of professional qualifications of preschool professionals. The program's goal is to create a critical mass of experts in charge of continuously improving Slovenia's preschool education and integrating it into global processes. It prepares graduates for research, leadership, and quality development in kindergartens, as well as special didactic areas.

The study programme is interdisciplinary, with students participating in development and research projects at the faculty and in practice. The master's degree programme includes the following modules:

- General modules
- Professional content modules

- Elective modules of professional content
- Common (faculty) elective modules
- Master's thesis

At the present time, the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana is planning to transform the high professional program into a university study programme of preschool education, bringing the education of preschool teachers on par with that of elementary school classroom teachers.

5. Ciciban kindergarten

The following is a presentation of the Ciciban Kindergarten, the largest kindergarten in Ljubljana, that also takes part in the PROROK project.

Ciciban kindergarten is Ljubljana's largest kindergarten, with six units located in Bežigrad. The kindergarten was established by the municipality of Ljubljana. Ciciban Kindergarten is a public institution whose main goals are to assist parents in caring for their children, to improve the quality of life of families and children, and to create conditions for the physical and mental development of children. The educational work is based on the Curriculum for Kindergartens' objectives and principles (1999).

Ciciban kindergarten has 54 preschool classes, one of which is the class for 6 children with special needs. The kindergarten has 201 employees. The kindergarten is led by the principal, who is assisted by three assistant principals. An accountant, two secretarial staff, two counsellors, a nutrition and health and hygiene organiser, and two other support staff complete the kindergarten's management team. Ciciban kindergarten employs 60 preschool teachers, 60 preschool teacher's assistants, 1 preschool teacher and 1 preschool teacher's assistant in the preschool class for children with special needs, 4 assistants for the children with special needs, and 52 technical workers (kitchen, cleaning, and laundry and maintenance workers).

Janitors at the Ciciban kindergarten keep the environment clean and safe. For each of the six units, the kindergarten employs four janitors. In addition to routine maintenance, they are in charge of delivering food to units that do not have their own kitchen. Four units have their own kitchen. Each kitchen has a head chef and several assistant chefs. Cleaners are assigned to individual units based on their size to maintain the kindergarten's cleanliness and tidiness.

5.1 Kindergarten development plan

The kindergarten's development plan is based on the kindergarten's vision and mission. It depicts the orientation and institutions over a five-year period. The en-

tire staff is involved in the planning. The educational process, staff development, cooperation with parents, cooperation with the local and wider environment, and space and material conditions are all represented in the development plan.

5.2 Kindergarten programmes

The daily schedule is adapted to the opening hours of each unit. The kindergarten is open from 5:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. From the opening until 7:30 a.m., the reception of children, and children's play prevail. Breakfast is served at 8:30. Planned and unplanned group and individual activities in various areas of the curriculum take place in the playroom and outdoors from 7:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with children resting if they wish. Lunch is at 12:00 for the first age group and at 12:30 for the second age group, snack at 2:30 p.m. From 15:30 to 17:00, there are activities in the playroom and outdoors.

5.3 Extra-curricular activities

The kindergarten provides children with extra activities such as a kindergarten in nature (3-day nature vacation for 4–5-year-olds; 5-day skiing and 5-day seaside vacation for 5-6 year-olds), theatre subscription, and English language integrated into the curriculum.

5.4 Educational staff responsibilities

Ciciban kindergarten tries to implement modern approaches and methods of preschool education. The cornerstone is children's play and empowering their natural curiosity. Because we want the children to actively participate in the programme and the life of the kindergarten, the learning processes are adapted to their specific needs. The preschool teachers plan daily activities that encourage children's active participation and development in all educational areas. The preschool class's annual work plan considers the goals to be achieved during the current school year and establishes thematic guidelines for planning group activities, age-appropriate field trips, projects, above-average activities, performances, events, and celebrations. Parents, educational and professional staff, and outworkers take part in the educational process as planned.

Educational work is adapted to the abilities of the child by providing new experiences and knowledge, as well as making meaningful demands on the children that promote active learning. Because social development is so important, Ciciban kindergarten enables the children to make social contacts based on their interests and provides them with experiences and knowledge about the diversity of their surroundings. Children's play is viewed as a method of child development and

learning, as well as the most natural activity in which the fundamental principles of preschool education are realised.

5.5 Meeting of the educational staff of the kindergarten

The activities in Ciciban kindergarten are led by preschool teachers. Their material is relevant to all areas of the curriculum. Preschool teachers choose a project according to their interests (creative workshops, romping children, Kamishibai theatre, a game that attracts and delights; forest education; recognition of non-verbal communication in interpersonal relationships, work on oneself, modern pedagogical approaches).

Preschool teachers enrol in in-service training courses of their choice. The costs for the in-service training are covered by the local community of Ljubljana.

5.6 Projects in Ciciban kindergarten

Ciciban kindergarten participates in the Ciciuhec, a reading project of the Ljubljana City Library aimed at preschool children and their parents, as part of the activity planning. Eco-School: The Eco-School programme is an internationally recognised integrated environmental education programme that promotes and raises awareness of sustainable development among children through education and training, as well as active participation in the local community and beyond. Erasmus+: the project's main goal is to enable participants to gain knowledge, skills, and experience that will enhance their education. In addition to the direct impact on individuals, the project activities bring about positive changes and developmental shifts within institutions, contributing to innovation and the renewal of Slovenia's education system. Mali sonček: the goal is to add modern movement and sports activities to the kindergarten's movement programme. Zeleni nahrbtnik: Zeleni nahrbtnik is a preschool environmental programme. The Ciciban Kindergarten is also a member of the forest kindergarten network.

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PEDAGOGICAL ASSISTANTS IN SLOVAKIA

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Etymology

Pedagogy

pedagoge, schoolmaster, teacher of children (late 14th century)
from Old French pedagoge teacher of children (14th century)
from Latin paedagogus, from Greek paidagōgos

Slave who escorts boys to school and generally supervises them, later a teacher or trainer of boys

Assistant

helpful, of assistance (mid-15th century)
from Latin assistentem

Stand by, Attend

1. Pedagogical assistants in Slovakia

Growing numbers of children with special educational needs have always demanded and still demand higher professional requirements on teachers nowadays. These children started to be educated in standard schools in the first half of 1880s.

In order to educate children with special educational needs (SEN) together with other children, it is necessary to prepare and equip the schools with supporting materials and staff. Pedagogical Assistant is a part of staff not only when it comes to integrated education but also as a support and help to pedagogical staff when working in classes with rich diversity of children. Contemporary school is very de-

manding which is also the reason why Pedagogical Assistant has a valid and legitimate role in the modern educational process.

Pedagogical Assistant (PA) is a common term which includes Teacher's Assistant, Educator's Assistant and Technical Production Master's Assistant (Vocational Schools), Kindergarten Assistant Educator and Supporting Educator in Kindergartens.

PA helps students to overcome medical, social and barriers caused by special learning disabilities (dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADD, ADHD, Asperger Syndrome, etc.). The goal of inclusive and integrated education is to allow and support each child's individual talent. This is also a job to which a Pedagogical Assistant contributes.

Due to growing numbers of children with special educational needs (SEN) the demand for Pedagogical Assistants is getting higher; however, there is a lack of them. It is this lack that is one of the main barriers in inclusion of children with special educational needs into standard schools. The reason is partially disinterest in schools as well as financial obstacles.

2. 1989 – 1992

Creations of the new Slovak Constitution and School Laws brought an integration of children with mental, somatic and sensory disorders, disabilities (dyslexia, ADHD, dysgraphia, etc.) but also gifted and talented children.

As the class composition was diversified the teachers were not able to cover the whole spectrum of needs in the educational process. This is why Pedagogical Assistants were introduced as a professional working position in a labour market.

Fundamental changes in the Slovak school system certainly occurred after 1989.

The problem with terms such as Teacher's Assistant (Teaching Assistant) and Pedagogical Assistant is partly a holdover from the now expired Act 317/2009, but mainly Act 597/2003 on the financing of schools and educational establishments. The original old concept of Law 317/2009 used the main pedagogical category of Teacher's Assistant, but distinguished in § 16 further subcategories such as assistant teacher, assistant teacher educator and assistant master of vocational education.

This distinction was abolished on 1.9.2019 by Act 138/2019 and only the main category Pedagogical Assistant (PA) is used in § 21. For both laws, the inclusive setting of the PA has always been in place to support all children who experience barriers in education or need to create equal opportunities in education.

3. 1996-1998

In 1996 a decree number 43/1996 Collection of Law came to force and allowed to employ special pedagogues and school psychologists who helped teachers and children to handle demands of common educational processes.

Later Romani Pedagogical Assistant and Pedagogical Assistants started to work at schools. They were then joined by more qualified staff working individually with children during lessons. Both these Assistants were helpful in:

- explaining the tasks
- managing the child's concentration
- supporting the child's overall inclusion
- improving the child's approach to learning

Pedagogical Assistant could be enlisted in classes with children with special educational needs in which, considering the degree of disability, it is not possible to guarantee the safety and protection of all participants of the educational process.

The next reason for a presence of Pedagogical Assistant is overcoming medical barriers. (Methodological instruction on the introduction of the profession of Pedagogical Assistant in the upbringing and education of children and pupils with special educational needs in pre-schools, primary schools and special primary schools No. 184/2003 – 095).

The assistant educator cooperates with the educator in the educational process in the school club.

The assistant master of vocational education assists the master of vocational education in the process of practical training and education.

Pedagogical Assistant is a relatively young profession in our country, which means that it is constantly evolving and undergoing various changes.

The introduction of the PA profession dates back to the 1990s, when it began to operate in practice with the help of non-governmental organisations under the name of Romani Assistants of Teacher.

Initially, it was applied in the education of Romani children and pupils in kindergartens, primary and special primary schools. The project of Romani Assistants of Teacher has been experimentally verified by various foundations and civic associations.

The profession of Romani Assistants of Teacher was introduced in 1998 in the process of experimental verification of the project "Acceleration of achievement of Romani pupils".

It was implemented by the Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and the Cabinet of Elementary Realities of the Faculty of Education of the University of Prešov.

Next Project focused on Romani assistants was "Reintegrácia rómskych žiakov zo sociálne a výchovne menej podnetného prostredia osobitných škôl medzi majoritnú populáciu" – „Reintegration of Romani pupils from the socially and educationally less stimulating environment of special schools into the majority population“ and experimentally verified by the same Faculty (Department of special pedagogy).

The both Projects were created and Financed by Foundation Nadácia Škola dokorán.

Foundation employed Romani assistants, ruled the workload, scope of activity etc. and helped them to find jobs via community services, or jobs in schools, Local/residential offices.

4. 2002-2022

The outcomes, outputs and results of the projects have confirmed the importance of creating the profession of Pedagogical Assistant. In order to unify the working conditions of Pedagogical Assistant, in 2002 the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic issued the first Methodological Instruction on the introduction of the profession of Pedagogical Assistant in preschool, primary and special primary schools.

The experimental validation was aimed at verifying to what extent the presence of a Romani PA in the teaching process can help children to adapt to the school environment, help them to overcome the language barrier, improve school performance and improve the social atmosphere at school.

In all areas, Assistants in general, have been shown to have a positive impact on children's school performance. Assistants are useful not only for the children themselves, but also for their teachers and parents. All results were verified and approved of the importance of all Pedagogical Assistants profession.

Among the Romani organisations, the first to take the initiative was the Association of Young Romani People (Banská Bystrica), which in 2002 began to implement the „Romani Pedagogical Assistant“ project, approved by the National Labour Office, in 35 districts of Slovakia.

The project involved 137 schools and 237 assistants.

The profession of Pedagogical Assistant started in 2002 – 2004 with a project called Romani Pedagogical Assistant. The project was implemented by the

non-profit organisation Association of Young Romani People (**Združenie mladých Rómov**). The Association of Young Romani People was founded in Slovakia in 1999 as a non-governmental organisation, operating mainly in the area of Banská Bystrica and its surroundings. Their aim was to have a long-term impact on the Romani population that created job opportunities targeted exclusively at Romani people. Before the law was amended, the requirements for the position of PAs were different from after the amendment. Before 2009, the requirements included, in particular, knowledge of the Romani language, willingness to expand pedagogical knowledge, and active work with the Romani community. At the same time, a person met the qualification conditions if he or she had obtained a full secondary education or a first degree and had completed additional pedagogical studies. After 2009, however, the function of PAs was regulated to several requirements, including higher education and knowledge of the state language, and therefore the original intention to employ Romani disappeared and their places were replaced by teaching staff of non-Romani origin who do not know the language or Romani culture.

According to Act No. 138/2019 on Pedagogical Assistants, the Assistant participates in the implementation of the school educational programme of the kindergarten and primary school according to the requirements of the teacher, tutor or master of vocational education, according to the requirements of the teacher, tutor or master of vocational education, the school for children or pupils with giftedness, the special school or the educational programme for children and pupils at the age of compulsory school attendance.

Their work also includes creating equal opportunities in education and training, overcoming language, health, social, cultural or other barriers.

Pedagogical Assistants may also be employed in secondary schools if the aim is to ensure the education of pupils with disabilities.

According to Act No. 138/2019 on Teaching and Professional Staff and on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Acts (§ 19), Pedagogical Assistant defines the categories of pedagogical staff, which include Pedagogical Assistant.

The concept of a Personal Assistant is also defined in Act No. 447/2008, on monetary contributions to compensate for severe disability and on amendments and supplements to certain acts, according to which a personal assistant is one who performs personal assistance and help to a natural person with severe disability in everyday activities.

A Personal Assistant is not a teaching staff member and should only be available to that particular integrated pupil. These are pupils with physical disabilities who need help with overcoming barriers when moving to another classroom, personal hygiene.

A larger group of pupils with disabilities need a Pedagogical Assistant, but they also need help with tasks that are not part of the Pedagogical Assistant job as a teaching staff member. In practice, it is often not only Pedagogical Assistant but also teachers who do activities because they want to help pupils and encourage others by their example.

Table 1. Comparison of the development of the number of Pedagogical Assistant in the Slovak Republic for kindergarten, primary, secondary, special kindergarten and special primary schools from 2005-2019 (state, private, church combined)

(Source: cvti.sk)

Year	Kindergartens	Primary Schools	High Schools	Special Kindergartens	Special Primary Schools
2005	44	656	0	6	32
2006	52	741	0	3	35
2007	41	727	0	10	41
2008	54	827	0	7	30
2009	58	765	3	15	35
2010	65	768	7	13	44
2011	56	836	7	18	50
2012	64	1038	13	25	47
2013	174	1131	14	25	55
2014	239	1653	23	28	60
2015	286	1728	33	33	72
2016	116	1728	38	45	61
2017	158	1916	34	35	82
2018	180	3121	50	45	128
2019	276	3902	53	53	850

All primary schools – state, private and religious – have seen an increase in the number of PAs since 2013. In state primary schools, the number of PAs has increased threefold since 2013.

Table 2. Trend in the number of Pedagogical Assistant in secondary schools in the Slovak Republic

(Source: cvti.sk)

Year	Gymnasium				Vocational secondary school			
	state	private	religious	total	state	private	religious	total
2009	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3
2010	1	2	1	4	3	0	0	3
2011	2	1	1	4	3	0	0	3
2012	2	1	0	3	8	2	0	10
2013	2	1	2	5	5	4	0	9
2014	1	2	2	5	13	5	0	18
2015	2	3	5	10	18	5	0	23
2016	4	6	4	14	18	6	0	24
2017	4	1	4	9	14	11	0	25
2018	7	3	7	17	21	11	1	33
2019	8	2	5	15	31	11	2	44

Since 2002, according to Act No. 408/2002, effective from 27 June 2002, the Pedagogical Assistant has become a subject that enters the educational process. The introduction of the Pedagogical Assistant profession was also implemented in accordance with Methodological Instruction No. 163/2002, issued by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic on 26 August 2002. This methodological instruction allowed the head of a school to establish the profession of teaching assistant in classes of primary schools, special primary schools or pre-school establishments attended by more than five pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The Pedagogical Assistant was involved in creating the conditions necessary to overcome, in particular, the language, health and social barriers of the child in the provision of the educational process.

Pedagogical Assistants gradually began to work not only with pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, but also with integrated pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools. The Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, in order to introduce the profession of Pedagogical Assistant in the education and training of children and pupils with special educational needs in pre-school establishments, primary schools and special primary schools, subsequently issued Methodological Instruction No 184/2003 – 095 on 6 December 2003.

Assistance is provided to pupils with special educational needs. According to the School Act No. 245/2008 on education and training (§2), a pupil with special educational needs is characterised as: a child, pupil who has a special educational

need diagnosed by the educational counselling facility, where by special educational programme we understand the requirement for adjustment of conditions, content, forms, methods and approaches in education and training resulting from his/her health disadvantage or talent, or development in a socially disadvantaged environment, the application of which is necessary to achieve an adequate level of education or adequate socialisation of the child.

The concept of Personal Assistant is also defined by Act No. 447/2008, on monetary contributions to compensate for severe disability and on amendments and supplements to certain acts, according to which a Personal Assistant is one who performs personal assistance and help to a natural person with severe disability in everyday activities. The job description of a personal assistant is very individual and varied and depends on the environment in which the assistance is provided and, in particular, on the client to whom it is provided.

According to Act No.138/2019 on Teaching and Professional Staff and on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Acts (§ 19), the Pedagogical Assistant defines the categories of teaching staff, which also include Pedagogical Assistants.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic may allocate funds to the founder of a public school on the basis of its application for the personal costs of PAs for pupils with disabilities pursuant to Section 4a of Act No. 597/2003 on the financing of primary schools, secondary schools and school facilities, as amended, and Guideline No. 55/2021 on the procedure for submitting requests for the personal costs of Pedagogical Assistants for pupils with disabilities. In accordance with Section 6 and Section 6a of the Act, the Ministry may also allocate funds to the founder of a religious and private school. The Ministry allocates funds for Pedagogical Assistants personnel costs to individual school founders through the regional offices of the school administration, depending on the resource possibilities of the state budget.

5. Pedagogical assistant in kindergarten

Origin:

Pedagogical Assistant in kindergarten is implemented from the “Plán obnovy a odolnosti SR” (Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic).

Date of publication of the call: 15.12.2021

Amount of total financial funds allocated to the call: 6 046 750 €

The objective of the call is to support kindergartens and special kindergartens through the employment of a Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergarten as a non-teaching staff member to assist in the provision of compulsory pre-primary

education to children with disabilities and/or children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Number of approved Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergarten from particular call was 338.

Staff category:

Non-teaching staff

The weekly working time:

37.5 hours + 2.5 hours (rest and meal breaks)

Support work carried out by the Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergarten (PAK) includes:

The implementation of upbringing and education in school and school facilities, including special schools or in a special training centre, in the facility for vocational rehabilitation of citizens with an altered working capacity, in the facility of social services or in the facility of socio-legal protection of children and social welfare, providing supervision at night and in self-service activities of children, young people or adult citizens.

Qualification requirements:

PAK must have completed at least secondary education (including lower secondary vocational education) and must have received training at the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre for Assistant Teachers in accordance with the provisions in the Call for Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergartens.

A Kindergarten Pedagogical Assistant's salary does not take into account any education higher than the minimum required.

Financial resources:

The funds will be sent to the founders through the regional school administration office. The founder will send the funds in full to the kindergarten that was successful in the "Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergarten" call.

Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergarten (PAK) and holidays:

Pursuant to Section 150(2) of the Education Act, effective from January 1st 2022, school holiday dates do not apply to kindergartens. The PAK, as well as other non-teaching staff, will only take leave during the interruption of the kindergarten's operation in July and August (the interruption is usually about 3 weeks). If the assistant teacher does not have sufficient days of leave, the employer will assign him the work agreed in the working time agreement/contract. If even this is not possible, it will be an obstacle to work on the part of the employer, for which the employer will proceed in accordance with Section 142 of the Labour Code. In this case, the employer cannot order the assistant to take leave without pay (unpaid

leave), because the employee may only take leave without pay by mutual agreement between the employee and the employer.

Table 3. Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergarten in Slovakia since 2008

		State Kindergartens	Private Kindergartens	Religious Kindergartens	Total
2008/2009	Number of KG	2 773	56	42	2 871
	Number of Pedagogical Assistant in Kindergarten (PAK)	32	18	4	54
2009/2010	Number of KG	2 765	64	44	2 873
	Number of PAK in KG	38	17	3	58
2010/2011	Number of KG	2 754	67	48	2 869
	Number of PAK in KG	43	20	2	65
2011/2012	Number of KG	2 743	67	55	2 865
	Number of PAK in KG	45	8	3	56
2012/2013	Number of KG	2 724	75	62	2 861
	Number of PAK in KG	44	17	3	64
2013/2014	Number of KG	2 716	89	65	2 870
	Number of PAK in KG	136	33	5	174*
2014/2015	Number of KG	2 725	101	70	2 896
	Number of PAK in KG	198	35	6	239**

* 110 Pedagogical Assistants in the framework of the national project *Inclusive education at the pre-primary level of the school system*

** 161 Pedagogical Assistants in the framework project *NP MRK 2* and 50 Pedagogical Assistants in the framework

The significant increase of Pedagogical Assistants in Kindergartens in the school year 2013/2014 (+110) and in the school year 2014/2015 (+211) was also due to the implementation of two national projects focused on inclusive education of children and pupils from marginalised Romani communities, which were implemented by the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre at that time.

6. 2023

6.1 Pedagogical assistants for disabled pupils

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic may allocate funds to the founder of a public school on the basis of its application for the personal costs of PAs for pupils with disabilities, pursuant to Section 4a of Act No.597/2003, 597/2003 on the financing of primary schools, secondary schools and educational establishments, as amended (hereinafter referred to as Act No. 597/2003) and Directive No. 55/2021 on the procedure for submitting requests for the personal costs of PAs for pupils with disabilities (hereinafter referred to as Directive No. 55/2021). In accordance with Section 6 and Section 6a of the said Act, the Ministry may also allocate funds to the founder of a religious and private school.

Number of Pedagogical Assistants for disabled pupils in Slovakia in 2023:
3237, 42

Number of Pedagogical Assistants for disabled pupils in Slovakia in 2022:
1.1.2022 – 31.8.2022: 3221, 42
1.9.2022 – 31.12.2022: 3239, 42

Number of Pedagogical Assistants for disabled pupils in Slovakia in 2021:
1.1.2022 – 31.8.2022: 3159, 11
1.9.2022 – 31.12.2022: 3222, 62

6.2 Examples from practice

- **Žiar nad Hronom**

According to information from a psychologist at the Centre for Educational and Psychological Counselling and Prevention (which has 2 psychologists and 7 professional staff) in the city called Žiar nad Hronom, kindergartens did not have Pedagogical Assistant and their founders did not have the money to fund them. Parents paid for their children with SEN from their own resources.

Elementary School with Kindergarten Štefana Moysesesa in Žiar nad Hronom, has established Kindergarten since 2005. The Pedagogical Assistant worked in the Kindergarten for the first time in the school year 2021/2022 on 50 percent full-time, paid from the budget of the primary school. The founder of the school is the Episcopal Community of Banská Bystrica.

- **Škola dokorán – Wide Open School**

The Foundation called Škola dokorán – Wide Open School (founded in 1994) is a non-profit organisation with nationwide scope, focused on lifelong learning, whose activities are implemented primarily in localities with a higher number of Roma communities and focuses on children and pupils from socially and linguistically disadvantaged backgrounds. Specifically, it is concerned with skills development, closing educational gaps for Romani pupils, advocating for changes to improve the quality of education for these pupils, targeted work with teaching and professional staff and changing the school environment and climate.

The Foundation has created the Step by Step programme, which from the very beginning of its implementation counts on the work of Pedagogical Assistants, professional staff and family coordinators. Family coordinators are the mediator between the family and the school, they help with the active involvement of parents in the life of the kindergarten and primary school and beyond, they cooperate with the surrounding community. The Step by Step programme in Slovakia was created by the Open Society Foundations, an organisation with origins in the United States of America. In collaboration with the non-profit organisation Children Resources International Washington D.C. and other professionals from the ranks of pedagogical and professional staff, a comprehensive program for the education and training of children and pupils of preschool and younger school age was created.

Many schools (elementary schools, kindergartens, primary schools) in the country have been involved in the program and a number of assistants, teachers, and educators have been trained in it.

- **Plavecký Štvrtok**

The Primary School Plavecký Štvrtok was also involved in the programme in 2007. The Wide Open School Foundation (Nadácia Škola dokorán), under the leadership of the director Eva Končková, trained two Romani Pedagogical Assistants for the municipality of Plavecký Štvrtok, a kindergarten teacher / a teacher and an educator in the primary school.

One of them, Mária Ort-Šnepová, is successfully applying and sharing her acquired knowledge and competences in 2022.

- **Rudno nad Hronom**

The first 50-percent-time Pedagogical Assistants was employed in the kindergarten in the village called Rudno nad Hronom in the school year 2008-2009. He worked with a child with Asperger's syndrome. The founder did not have the financial means to fund him and therefore he was co-financed. He was a non-teaching worker who practically guarded the child so that he did not escape from the kindergarten.

- **Kremnica**

Since the school year 2017/2018 in the kindergarten Dolná 57, Kremnica, worked only one Pedagogical Assistant. It was for a period of 3 years and its financing was provided by the founder – Kremnica city (source: director of the Kindergarten).

The United Kremnica School has a special primary school at the Kremnica Psychiatric Hospital and a special kindergarten. The special kindergarten was established in the school year 2021/2022 with one class for 5 children with autism in a separate building (a family house on Sama Chalupka Street, owned by Regional Office of School Administration). The special primary school works with 5 children with autism in the preparatory year and with 5 children with autism within primary school. The whole combined school for 15 children with autism has 1, 65 Pedagogical Assistant. It was financed by the founder of the Regional Office of School Administration in Banská Bystrica. One Pedagogical Assistant is allocated under the Methodological-Pedagogical Centre project. The project continued in the school year 2021/2022. The principal of the Combined School approached the founder of the Regional Office of School Administration in Banská Bystrica for an increase in the number of Pedagogical Assistants, based on the psychological examinations of the pupils, and the founder referred her to the pedagogical-psychological counselling centre. Only special educators work in the United School.

- **Bratislava**

Kindergarten Jána Smreka 6157 in Devínska Nová Ves (Bratislava) did not use the work of Pedagogical Assistants until the school year 2019 – 2020. From the school year 2020/2021 they employed 2 Pedagogical Assistants for children with special educational needs.

The kindergarten Milana Marečka 6110 in Devínska Nová Ves did not use the work of the Pedagogical Assistant until the school year 2019 – 2020.

In the 2005/2006 school year, the Morovnianska cesta Primary School employed one Romani PAs and one Pedagogical Assistant.

6.3 Teaching staff and non-teaching staff in Slovakia

Accompanist

Master of vocational education

Master of vocational education in schools for pupils with special educational needs

School special pedagogue

School Coach

Secondary primary school teacher

Teacher of a language school

Kindergarten teacher

Kindergarten teacher for children with special educational needs

Teacher of a practical school and teacher of a vocational school

Teacher of professional development

Teacher of the first stage of primary school

Teacher of the first stage of primary school for pupils with special educational needs

High school teacher

Secondary school teacher for pupils with special educational needs

Teacher of primary art school

Educator

Educator of children and pupils with special educational needs

Pedagogical Assistant

Career Advisor

Therapeutic pedagogue

Speech and language therapist and school speech therapist

Psychologist and school psychologist

Social pedagogue

Special educator and terrain special educator

Accompanist

- a second-level university degree in arts, in a study programme focusing on musical arts – piano, conducting or composition
- a first-class university degree in arts, in a study programme focusing on musical arts – piano performance, conducting or composition
- higher vocational education in music education – composition, conducting, piano or organ
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Master of vocational education

- second-level higher education in the field of study of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in a study programme focusing on practical teacher training in the relevant fields of study and apprenticeship according to the state educational programme for complete secondary vocational education, secondary vocational education and lower secondary vocational education
- a first-level higher education qualification in the field of study of teaching and educational sciences, in a programme of study focusing on practical teacher training in the relevant fields of study and apprenticeship according to the national curricula for upper secondary education, upper secondary vocational education and lower secondary vocational education
- complete secondary vocational education in the relevant group of fields of education and post-secondary qualification studies for masters of vocational education

- full secondary vocational education in another field of education, post-secondary qualification studies for vocational masters and the acquisition of a qualification in the relevant group of fields of education
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Master of vocational education in schools for pupils with special educational needs

- second-level higher education in the field of study of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in a study programme focusing on practical teacher training in the relevant fields of study and apprenticeship according to the state educational programme for complete secondary vocational education, secondary vocational education and lower secondary vocational education
- a first-level higher education qualification in the field of study of teaching and educational sciences, in a programme of study focusing on practical teacher training in the relevant fields of study and apprenticeship according to the national curricula for upper secondary education, upper secondary vocational education and lower secondary vocational education
- complete secondary vocational education in the relevant group of fields of education and post-secondary qualification studies for masters of vocational education
- full secondary vocational education in another field of education, post-secondary qualification studies for vocational masters and the acquisition of a qualification in the relevant group of fields of education
- other qualification requirements according to the Decree

School special pedagogue

- a second-level university degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on special education
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

School Coach

- a second-level university degree in sport science, in a study programme focusing on coaching in the relevant sport, including combinations with another field of study
- a first cycle university degree in a sport science field of study, in a study programme focusing on coaching in the sport concerned, including combinations with another field of study
- higher vocational education in another field, additional pedagogical studies for the performance of professional activity in the category of school coach and professional competence in the category of coach of at least qualification level III in the relevant sport
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Secondary primary school teacher

- a second-level university degree in teaching and educational sciences, in a study programme focusing on lower secondary education

- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Secondary primary school teacher for pupils with special educational needs

- a second-level university degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on special education
- other qualification requirements according to the Decree

Teacher of a language school

- a second-level university degree in teaching and educational sciences, in a study programme focusing on the teaching of the foreign language concerned
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Kindergarten teacher

- a second-level university degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on pre-school pedagogy
- a first-class university degree in a study programme specialising in early childhood education
- full secondary vocational education in the field of kindergarten teaching and education
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Kindergarten teacher for children with special educational needs

- a second-level university degree in teaching and educational sciences, in a study programme focusing on teaching in special kindergarten
- a first-class university degree in a study programme specialising in special kindergarten teaching
- full secondary vocational education in the field of kindergarten teaching and education and further education in the field of study, special pedagogy
- other qualification requirements according to the Decree

Teacher of a practical school and teacher of a vocational school

- a second-level university degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on special education
- other qualification requirements according to the Decree

Teacher of professional development

- a second-level university degree, fulfilment of the qualification requirements for a teacher, master teacher or tutor, seven years' professional activity and first attestation
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Teacher of the first stage of primary school

- a second-level university degree in teaching and educational sciences, in a study programme focusing on primary education
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Teacher of the first stage of primary school for pupils with special educational needs

- a second-level university degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on special education
- other qualification requirements according to the Decree

High school teacher

- second-level higher education in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on the teaching of relevant subjects according to the state educational programme for complete secondary general education, complete secondary vocational education, secondary vocational education and lower secondary vocational education
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Secondary school teacher for pupils with special educational needs

- a second-level university degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on special education
- other qualification requirements according to the Decree

Teacher of primary art school

- university education of the second degree in the field of study of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in a study programme focused on teaching relevant subjects according to the state educational programme for primary art schools
- a university degree of the first cycle in the field of study of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in a study programme focusing on the teaching of relevant subjects according to the state educational programme for elementary art schools
- higher vocational education in music, art, dance, literature and drama or audio-visual and multimedia production
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Educator

- a university degree of the second degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focused on education
- a university degree of the first degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on education complete secondary vocational education in the field of study Education and Care, Kindergarten Teacher and Educator, Social Educational Worker, Leisure Time Animator or PAs
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Educator of children and pupils with special educational needs

- university education of the second degree in the study field of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in the study programme focused on teaching in special primary schools and in practical schools, including the study programme carried out in combination of the respective study field with another study field and

the bachelor teacher study programme focused on education in schools and school facilities for children and pupils with special educational needs

- university education of the second degree in the study field of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in the study programme focused on education and extension studies in special education
- university education of the second degree in the field of study of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in a study programme focusing on special pedagogy and a bachelor's study programme focusing on special pedagogy
- university education of the first degree in the field of study of teaching and pedagogical sciences, in the study programme focused on education in schools and school facilities for children and pupils with special educational needs – complete secondary vocational education in the field of study of special education
- other qualifications according to the Decree

Pedagogical assistant

- complete secondary vocational education in the field of education focused on teaching and education; complete secondary education and supplementing pedagogical competence; complete secondary education and specialisation qualification studies for PAs in methodological and pedagogical centres completed by 31 August 2010.

To perform the activity of a PA, the qualification requirements must be met at the level of complete secondary vocational education, also the completion of a field of study pedagogical school or pedagogical lyceum or field of study social-educational worker at the pedagogical and social academy.

- first-degree university study in the study programme in the field of study pre-school and elementary pedagogy; in the study programme in the field of study Teaching of Academic Subjects, Teaching of professional subjects and Teaching of arts and education subjects; in the study programme in the field of study pedagogy; in a study programme in special education, teaching, education or non-teaching field of study; in a study programme focusing on education; in non-teacher study programmes and the completion of pedagogical competence.
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

6.3.1 Specialist staff

Career Advisor

- a university degree in psychology, in a study programme focusing on educational psychology, school psychology, counselling psychology, occupational and organisational psychology or career consulting
- a university degree in economics and management, in a study programme in human resources or personnel management or in career consulting

- a second-level higher education qualification in social work, in a study programme specialising in social services and counselling or in career consulting
- a university degree of the second cycle in the field of study Teaching Educational Sciences in a study programme focusing on andragogy
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Therapeutic pedagogue

- a university degree in speech therapy and therapeutic pedagogy, in a study programme focusing on therapeutic pedagogy, including a combination with another field of study
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Speech and language therapist and school speech therapist

- a second-level university degree in speech therapy and therapeutic pedagogy, in a study programme focusing on speech therapy, including a combination with another field of study
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Psychologist and school psychologist

- a second-level university degree in psychology; the study programme may also focus on educational psychology, school psychology, counselling psychology or occupational and organisational psychology
- a second-level higher education qualification, fulfilment of the qualification requirements for teacher, master of vocational education or educator and further study
- a second-level university degree, fulfilment of the qualification requirements for a school special educator and further study
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Social pedagogue

- a second-level university degree in the field of study Teaching and Educational Sciences, in a study programme focusing on social pedagogy
- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

Special educator and terrain special educator

- a second-level university degree in teaching and educational sciences in a study programme focusing on special pedagogy
- second-level higher education, fulfilment of the qualification prerequisites for a teacher, a master of vocational education or an educator, extension studies and at least five years of professional activity in the provision of counselling and intervention to children and pupils with special educational needs
- second-level university education, fulfilment of the qualification requirements for psychologist and school psychologist, career counsellor, speech and language therapist, therapeutic pedagogue and social pedagogue, extension

studies and at least five years of professional activity in the provision of counselling and intervention to children and pupils with special educational needs

- other qualifications as laid down in the Decree

7. From day-care centres to kindergartens, from helpers to pedagogical assistants

The first public preschool facility in Slovakia was a day-care centre in Banská Bystrica. It was founded on 4 November 1829 by Countess Theresa Brunswicka (1775-1861), the promoter of nursing homes in Ungarn. It was the second facility of this type in Ungarn. It was financed by the so-called Women's Association. It was not only to provide an isolated asylum for poor children, but also to educate and raise the spirit and cultural level of these children.



The first statutory provision for kindergartens in our territory came into force in 1891. Parents were obliged to send their children from 3 to 6 years of age to kindergarten if there was no guarantee that they would be sufficiently cared for at home. Municipalities were obliged to establish pre-school institutions. There was to be one teacher and an assistant for every 80 children. The condition for a teacher was therefore that she had to be proficient in the Hungarian language, in both spoken and written form. The training of teachers for kindergartens was carried out in two-year special institutes. Graduates of the fourth grade of secondary, bourgeois or

higher girls' schools could be accepted. Their training was, in addition to its practical character, also oriented towards the development of pedagogical knowledge.

Other day-care centres were established in Bratislava (1830) and Trnava (1832). In these day-care centres the approaches of individual pedagogical concepts were mixed. In Trnava, Anton Rehlingen, who wrote the work "Day-care Centre for Young Children" (*Opatrovňa malých detí*), worked as a teacher. Together with Theresa Brunswick, they also took care of the education of helpers in the day-care centres. The establishment of other children's day-care centres was closely connected with the activities of the Women's Charity Society and the Society of Friends of Teachers.



CONCLUSION

The importance and justification of the profession of a pedagogical assistant working in a kindergarten, primary or secondary school have been proven over time.

Understanding the issue of learning disabilities (specific developmental learning or behavioural disabilities, specific, learning disabilities, developmental learning disabilities) is not at all easy. Historical sources convince us that learning disabilities have existed in the past and are still one of the most acute problems of our education system. It is an issue that is slowly making its way into the awareness of the lay public, thanks to research and professionals. Learning disabilities affect a high percentage of the child population today. Pedagogical assistants and, of course, teaching or non-teaching staff (kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools) play the biggest role in the education of pupils with learning disabilities. Of course, Pedagogical Assistants are also undeniably important in the education of pupils from marginalised or socially excluded communities.

All over the world, people are remembering the importance of the pedagogical assistant profession.

Kindergarten Day

In 2014, on the initiative of the Slovak Committee of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (WOEPE), the idea of organising a Kindergarten Day in Slovakia was born. This important day, not only for kindergartens, but also for our country, is organised annually on November 4th.

National Teaching Assistants' Day

In the UK and the USA, it is National Teaching Assistants' Day – September 16th.

Teacher Aide Appreciation Week

November 17th

Educational Assistants Day

March 1st, USA

National Educational Support Professionals Day

November 15th

Educational Assistant Appreciation Day

November 18th

Educational Assistant and Child and Youth Worker Appreciation Day

January 19th

World Teachers' Day

October 5th

Child Care Worker and Early Childhood Educator Appreciation Day

October 21st

International Day of Education

January 24th

Pedagogical Assistants do amazing things every day. Every morning it is not uncommon to witness Pedagogical Assistants meet and greet students with a friendly smile and a hug. Their schedules are often much more strenuous and complicated than those of teachers. Many assistants move between multiple levels in education/assistance every day without fail.

If there had been support for teachers and assistants of the teacher in the Ancient Times, Medieval Age, etc., it does seem a shame that similar support is not professionally implemented nowadays.

THE PROBLEM OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATION DIFFERENCES: THE CASE OF ONE MULTILINGUAL KINDERGARTEN

Lucia Rauková (Slovakia)

1. The problem of national qualification differences

1.1 Basic information about private kindergarten UNES

Private kindergarten UNES is the kindergarten that is included in the network of schools and school facilities since 1st September 2015 based on the decision of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (No. 2015-17811/42407:2-100B). Private kindergarten UNES is an exceptional kindergarten that provides an experimentally verified educational program that focuses on cultures and languages

The main goal of the kindergarten UNES is to provide preschool education in Slovak, English and Spanish for children aged 2 to 7 years.

The principle of operation of the kindergarten is quite simple. The children are divided into 9 or 10 groups according to age, and each group has two teachers who are teaching alternating on an even and uneven week basis. Even weeks children learn in English, uneven weeks children learn in Spanish. English and also Spanish are compulsory for all children attending the kindergarten UNES. It is not possible to select only one language.

However, the approval of the kindergarten UNES program involved a lengthy legislative process. After the first year of operation, we requested the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic for the experimental verification. The objective of the experimental verification was to verify the functionality and meaningfulness of the newly conceived educational program for kindergartens. The program was named The Door of languages unlocked.

This program represents an alternative to the existing state educational program for pre-primary education in kindergartens and is in line with the ideological intentions of the kindergarten UNES as well as with existing trends in preschool education from an international point of view.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic approved the "School educational program The door of languages unlocked" for the experimental verification, which began to be implemented from September 1, 2016 to August 31, 2019. During these three years, experimental verification took place in the kindergarten UNES. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic approved the School Educational Program The door of languages unlocked, which can only be applied in the private kindergarten UNES due to the necessary specific consideration of the qualification requirements of teachers, not only for the same, but also related fields such as preschool and elementary pedagogy.

1.2 School educational program „The door of languages unlocked“

The name of the program "The door of languages unlocked" takes the name of one of the most famous works of Johann Amos Comenius. This program is binding for all teachers who work in the Kindergarten UNES and also for all children who attend the Kindergarten UNES and are provided with preschool education exclusively according to this program.

The door of languages unlocked is a preschool education program that responds to the very current challenges of education in a society that is based on the inevitable coexistence in a multicultural environment, in an environment where people with different backgrounds exist side by side, speak different languages and through them express their values, their vision of the world and its way of existence. It follows on from the challenges of the European language education policy, which requires mastery of several languages.

The basic goal of the program is to prepare children to enter a culturally and linguistically diverse environment in the current globalized world and to help them to begin to orient themselves in such a world in terms of values, practicality and

humanly. Preschool education according to this program gives children such opportunities to fully realize their potential in all aspects of their development.

Other specific goals of the program are: to improve social contact with peers and adults so that children are involved in relationships with persons representing other cultures and other languages, to facilitate children's adaptation to diverse cultural and linguistic patterns, to especially support the child's relationship to learning foreign languages, to enable the child learning through direct experience with cultural diversity, especially through play and active communication.

As mentioned above, the school education program in the kindergarten is mainly applied in English and Spanish. It should be noted that the children also learn in the Slovak language, because they live in the Slovak Republic and this right must not be taken away from them. For this reason, we had to focus on the possibilities of incorporating the Slovak language into the kindergarten program. The Slovak language is used through Slovak assistants, Slovak teachers, during communication in the Slovak language, during preschool preparation classes in the Slovak language and also in the form of external lessons conducted in the Slovak language

Children are admitted to the kindergarten UNES from the age of 2. To facilitate the adaptation of the youngest children (from 2 to 4 years old), a Slovak-speaking teacher's assistant is present in each class, who communicates with the child in the Slovak language (if the child needs help, it is necessary to calm the child down, explain something at the beginning of the adaptation, etc.). This teacher's assistant must also be able to speak English in order to be able to communicate with a foreign teacher. For children from the age of 4, the Slovak language is ensured by a form of communication in the Slovak language, which is conducted by a qualified Slovak-speaking teacher for 30 minutes every day according to the schedule of the given group. Children aged 5 and over, for whom pre-school education is compulsory, also have 45 minutes of pre-school training with a qualified Slovak-speaking teacher every day.

Languages are also used during the afternoon club activity. Children from the age of 4 participate in physical activities according to the schedule of their group every day. This school year, they participate in yoga, karate, relaxation, playing musical instruments, zumba and also a painting club. If an external lecturer is not able to provide a class in English or Spanish, in this case he leads it in Slovak.

1.3 The process of searching for the pedagogical employees and their qualification

It is clear from the above that the private kindergarten UNES operates as a kindergarten that is authorized to provide preschool education in Slovak, English and Spanish. It is not possible to ensure the implementation of the program only by

Slovak-speaking teachers. For this reason, since the beginning of the operation of the kindergarten UNES, it was necessary to search for foreign teachers who would come to work to the kindergarten UNES.

The uniqueness of the team of the private kindergarten UNES is formed by the diversity of teaching staff who come from different countries of the world and speak different languages. Undoubtedly, this allows us to maintain a multicultural atmosphere within the Kindergarten UNES due to the constant multicultural interaction that takes place in a natural environment.

Our requirements for the teachers we needed to employ were high. The first requirement was that he/she will be a qualified teacher for working in a kindergarten according to Slovak laws (see below). Ideally, this teacher should be a qualified teacher of the given language (English or Spanish). It would be an advantage if he/she would have an experience working in a kindergarten. Our goal was to find teachers who would be able to communicate in English, since all communication in the kindergarten – communication between employees, parents, documentation of the child, documentation of the kindergarten is conducted in English. Our search focused mainly on teachers from the European Union due to the simplicity of the employment process, as these individuals can start working immediately and do not have to wait for a work permit.

At the beginning of the operation of the private kindergarten UNES, when we did not have much experience in employing foreigners, we searched for teachers through various websites that were looking for au-pair or nannies. We also tried to contact several foreign universities. We also used various Spanish teacher job sites to find Spanish language kindergarten teachers. We also used the Internet platform Facebook, recommendations for teachers from teachers who worked for us in the past. In the beginning, we considered searching and especially finding teachers as one of the most difficult processes of our work.

The private kindergarten UNES must follow the laws of the Slovak Republic in this case, it is Act 138/2019 Coll. on teaching staff and professional staff and on amendments to certain laws.

Prerequisites for performing the work of a teaching and professional employee according to Act no. 138/2019 Coll. guides § 9. These prerequisites are qualification prerequisites, integrity, medical fitness and command of the state language. Pedagogical employees and professional employees must meet the prerequisites for the performance of work activities throughout the entire time of performance of work activities.

In the case of employment of a teaching employee who does not meet the qualification requirements, when signing the employment contract, we will make him sign an amendment to the employment contract, in which we condition him to

complete the qualification requirements for the performance of the work activity no later than 4 years from the beginning of the first employment relationship. In this case, we consider the pedagogical employee as a pedagogical employee who meets the qualification requirement. Most of our teachers who come from abroad stay with us for a period of two years, and in this case we can meet the qualification requirement.

According to Act no. 138/2019 Coll. on pedagogical employees and professional employees and on the amendment of certain laws, § 14 defines the assessment of the fulfillment of qualification prerequisites. For the purpose of assessing the fulfillment of the qualification requirements, the pedagogical employee and professional employee submits, if required by the employer, a certificate of full qualification issued by an authorized educational institution or a document of recognition of a professional qualification obtained in another state, which was issued according to a special regulation.

Qualification prerequisites are also dealt with in Decree no. 437/2009 Coll. (Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic), which establishes qualification prerequisites and special qualification requirements for individual categories of teaching staff and professional staff.

In the case of a teaching employee who comes from the countries of the European Union, his/ her education is accepted by the Slovak Republic. In the case of a teaching employee who comes from third countries, his/her education must be nostrified by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, and after obtaining the nostrification, the given teaching employee will be considered a teaching employee who meets the qualification requirement. It is necessary to draw attention to the fact that this process of nostrification takes several months.

1.4 Problems connected with searching and employing of the pedagogical employees

In the first years of the operation of the private kindergarten UNES, we had a major problem in finding qualified teachers who would teach in the English language. In several cases, we employed qualified English language teachers who had no experience working with children in kindergarten. These teachers were qualified in their countries to work as English language teachers in primary school and also in secondary school. They were not qualified to work in a kindergarten. However, it caused problems because they did not know the methodology of working in a kindergarten, they had difficulty adapting to the fact that their role is to provide pre-school language education to children and not to teach the English language. They did not know how to adapt their work to the age of the children in kindergarten.

We assume that we would be able to find a "native" qualified kindergarten teacher to provide pre-school education in the English language. However, we are unable to meet their salary expectations. The salary conditions we provide are not sufficient for a kindergarten teacher who would come from countries such as Great Britain, the United States of America, Australia and others.

We have learned from our experience over the last 8 years that it is necessary to focus on qualified teachers so as not to cause problems in the Kindergarten UNES team, among children, parents, etc.

Unqualified teaching staff caused us problems in the functioning of the kindergarten, they did not know how to adapt, they did not know the methods or strategies of working with small children, the children did not respect them. Subsequently, parents were also dissatisfied, complaining about the work of the teachers. These unqualified teaching staff were not able to provide the same quality preschool education compared to qualified teaching staff.

The current situation is such that we have reduced our requirements and in the case of a kindergarten teacher in English, we are open to the employment of qualified Slovak preschool teachers who have lived in an English-speaking country for a long time and whose level of command of the English language is at the C2 (expert) level. However, it is very important to emphasize that the children cannot know that the teacher knows the Slovak language. In this case, progress in language acquisition would slow down and the child would not achieve the expected skills and knowledge. Children think that the teacher does not understand anything in the Slovak language and for this reason the child must learn very quickly how to communicate his/her needs, because otherwise he/she will not understand him/her. In a way, this forces children to try harder.

We hire Spanish language kindergarten teachers exclusively from Spain. We are looking for these teachers through the internet platforms www.colegios.es or www.indeed.es. Each one of them is qualified to work in a kindergarten, they are able to integrate very quickly, the children like them very much and we have very good experience with them, they are very adaptable. We try not to accept Spanish language kindergarten teachers from third countries (for example from South American countries) due to the more complicated work permit requirements at the foreign police, the necessary certification of the diploma at the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic. It is not worth it for us to arrange a nostrification for a teacher who will work at the kindergarten UNES for the period of two years.

Table 1. The current qualificational structure of the employees of the kindergarten UNES

Achieved education	The number of employees
University education- Master degree	9
University education-Bachelor degree	3
Fully secondary vocational education	2
Secondary school education	4

1.5 Teachers versus pedagogical assistants

First of all, it is necessary to explain that the UNES kindergarten is staffed by pedagogical staff-teachers and assisted by pedagogical assistants.

The main task of a pedagogical employee-teacher is to coordinate education and training in the relevant class, to keep relevant pedagogical documentation. The teacher is responsible for creating the conditions for the development of positive social ties between children, between children and school staff, cooperates with legal representatives, pedagogical staff and professional staff, provides children and legal representatives with advice on upbringing and education.

The role of the pedagogical assistant is direct cooperation with the teacher in the classroom and also with other pedagogical employees of the school, facilitating the adaptation of the child to the school environment and helping to overcome language barriers, co-organizing the child's activities during the educational process in accordance with the teacher's instructions, helping children in the field of hygiene, eating and dressing. Pedagogical assistants are present in classes that attend children up to 4 years of age.

1.6 Qualificational differences between teachers and pedagogical assistants

When searching for a teaching assistant, we do not have very high demands. Our main criterium is that the assistant has experience working with children in kindergarten, and also that she has mastered the basics of the English language, because her main task is to communicate with the child in the Slovak language. It is an advantage if the assistant has good knowledge of the English language, but it is enough for her to master the basics and be able to communicate with a kindergarten teacher who does not speak Slovak. It is also an advantage if the assistant has a pedagogical education and is qualified to work in a kindergarten. If she is

not qualified, we will require her to complete the required education within 4 years from the start of the first employment contract in kindergarten with an addendum to the employment contract.

Most assistants who are interested in this job position have completed secondary education or secondary vocational education.

Most of the pedagogical staff – teachers who work in the UNES kindergarten have a first or second degree university education and a very good level of English language due to the necessary communication in English.

1.7 Qualification of pedagogical employees coming from the Slovak Republic

Pedagogical employees working in the kindergarten of UNES meet the qualification requirements for the work of a teacher in a kindergarten.

Of these, two female teachers graduated from secondary professional pedagogic school with a duration of study of 4 years. Subsequently, both worked for more than 10 years as kindergarten teachers in Great Britain, where they also completed several courses and trainings to supplement their education.

Another two teachers completed a 2-year qualifying supplementary study in the field of teaching for kindergartens and education.

One teacher is a graduate of the University of Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy. One teacher completes her qualification prerequisites by studying a bachelor's degree in the field of Preschool and Primary School Education.

1.8 Qualification of pedagogical assistants coming from the Slovak Republic

The highest required level of education for the job of teaching assistant is a first-level university education.

Four teaching assistants work in the kindergarten UNES, one of whom is a 3rd-year student in the field of Physical Education Teaching. The second assistant has completed her bachelor's degree in Art and Ethics Teaching and is still a master's student in this field and should complete her master's degree this year. The other two assistants graduated from high school, they do not meet the qualification requirements for the work of pedagogical assistant in a kindergarten, but they were conditioned in the employment contract to complete their pedagogical

studies within 4 years and thereby become qualified. Based on this condition in the employment contract, they are considered qualified teaching staff.

Table 2. Qualification of pedagogical employess coming from other countries than the Slovak Republicc

The name of the field of study	The name of the university, country	The lenght of study	The number of employess
Grado Maestro en Educación Infantil	Universidad de Castilla La Mancha, Spain	4 years	1
Grado Maestro en Educación Infantil	Universidad de La Laguna, Tenerife, Spain	4 years	1
Magisterio Especialidad de Educación Infantil	Universidad de Murcia Spain	3 years	1
Magisterio Especialidad de Educación Infantil	Universidad de Valladolid Spain	3 years	1
Master en Psicopedagogía	Spain	1 year	1
Magisterio Especialidad de Educación Infantil y Magisterio Especialidad de Primaria	Universidad de Jaén, Spain	3 years + 1 year	1
Grado en Educación Primaria y Grado en Educación Infantil	Universidad Camilo José Cela de Madrid, Spain Universidad de San Pablo CEU en Vigo, Spain	4 years + 1 year	1
Máster Guía IMI Montessori para niños de 0 – 6años online	Universidad de Barcelona, Spain	2,5 years online	1
Teaching of English as a foreign language	Institute 4020 of English language Teaching and Translating, Santa Fe Argentina	5 years	1
Teaching of English as a foreign language	Cherkassy National University, Ukraine Pereiaslav- Khmelnytskyi Hryhorii Skovoroda State Pedagogical University, Ukraine	4 years + 1,5 year	1

This table contains an exact list of the fields of study completed by the teaching staff working in the UNES kindergarten, together with information about the given university, country, length of study and the number of employees who completed

the given field. The given study combinations of each pedagogical employee are distinguished from each other by color.

Pedagogical staff who obtained their qualification in Spain and graduated from a field of study (Magisterio especialidad Educación Infantil) can work as teachers with children aged 0 to 6 years in nurseries and kindergartens. However, this acquired education also enables them to work as a teacher in a state primary school. They cannot work as teachers in a private primary school.

Teaching staff who have obtained their qualifications in Spain and graduated in a field of study (Magisterio especialidad de Educación Infantil y Magisterio Especialidad de Primaria) can work as teachers with children aged 0 to 6 years in nurseries and kindergartens. However, their acquired qualification enables them to work as a teacher in both types of primary schools - in private and in state primary schools.

Pedagogical staff who have obtained their qualification in Spain and graduated in the field of study (Grado en Educación Primaria y Grado en Educación Infantil) can work as primary school teachers in both types of primary schools - in private and in public primary schools. They can work as kindergarten teachers with children from 0 to 6 years old in daycare centers and kindergartens.

Pedagogical employees who studied Teaching English as a foreign language in Argentina and Ukraine can work as English language teachers in primary and secondary schools. These teachers do not meet the qualification requirements for working as kindergarten teachers in their native countries.

1.9 Ensuring the professional development of the employees working in the private kindergarten UNES

The obligation to take care of deepening the qualification of employees or increasing it is one of the basic duties of leading pedagogical employees (directors).

§ 153 of Act no. 311/2001 Coll. (Labour Code) and on the amendment of certain laws as amended. Law no. 568/2009 Coll. on lifelong learning and amendments to certain laws, as amended, dated December 1, 2009 confirms this. It is the result of all previous documents that were also discussed within the European Union.

Professional development is managed according to the Professional Development Plan for the period of one school year, which results from the focus of the kindergarten and was discussed in the pedagogical council and with the founder. On the basis of this plan, the kindergarten publishes the Annual Education Plan for teaching staff, which can be supplemented and changed during its validity in accordance with the current possibilities and needs of the kindergarten.

The annual education plan will be prepared by the kindergarten director together with the head of the methodological association based on the documents provided by all the teaching staff. The director of the kindergarten is responsible for developing and following the annual plan for further education of teaching staff. According to this annual plan, the qualification development of employees is ensured.

Professional educational plan is carried out by:

- education,
- creative activity related to the performance of work, especially scientific, research, publishing or artistic activities,
- self-education and performance of work activities or
- completion of a professional internship focused on innovation of professional competences.

It is not possible to ensure professional development for all teaching staff working in the kindergarten UNES in Slovakia, because, as mentioned above, not all teaching staff speak Slovak.

For this reason, teaching staff look for available online courses and training suitable for teachers working in kindergartens through foreign universities, or use various foreign webinars, etc.

It is very important that teaching staff are also educated in the languages in which the kindergarten UNES provides pre-primary education. For this reason, we motivate teachers to work on themselves, to educate themselves and to be able to understand at least the basics in Slovak, English and Spanish. In this school year, we have ensured the professional development of the teaching staff working in the kindergarten UNES as follows: 3 teachers participate in the Slovak language courses (two Spanish language teachers and one English language teacher), 6 Spanish language teachers participate in the English language courses, and 2 Slovak-speaking teachers participate in the Spanish language course.

Pedagogical employees have the option of choosing the courses and trainings in which they would like to be educated. This year, the employees chose the following trainings and courses:

- Art therapy in work with children of preschool age
- The child with problematic behaviour in the kindergarten
- Training for vegetable lecturers on the topic: Prevention of childhood obesity
- Development of speech and vocabulary in preschool children using communication blocks
- Montessori pedagogy for the kindergarten
- Spanish teacher course for foreigners (Instituto Europeo De Estudios Empresariales INESEM)

- Participation in the conferences within the project Prorok
- Professional conference for the kindergarten directors

It is very important for us that the teaching staff constantly work on themselves so that they are interested in continuing to learn. The advantage of the UNES Kindergarten is the young teaching team, who are interested in advancement, self-education, and often come to the principal themselves with an offer of courses they would like to take in a given school year.

2. Current legislations and problems resulting from it

When assessing the qualification requirements for the work of a kindergarten teacher according to the current legislation, several problems often arise. We will mention only three that we encounter most often.

The first of them is the need for kindergarten teachers to be able to speak the Slovak language. Since the UNES kindergarten works according to an experimentally verified program that requires specific criteria, it is not possible to ensure a sufficient number of Slovak-speaking teachers who would provide preschool education according to the program in English and Spanish.

In this case, it would have to mean that only Slovak-speaking teachers would work in the kindergarten UNES, but then the importance of creating this exceptional program would be lost.

The second problem we encounter is the recognition of the qualifications of a teacher who is a graduate of the Teaching of English Language and Literature program, or Teaching Spanish language and literature. In this case, we are faced with the question of whether such a pedagogical employee is qualified to work in a kindergarten.

Another problem is a pedagogical employee who has a degree in primary pedagogy and, for example, in Spain is qualified to work in a primary school, but could also work in a kindergarten, in Slovakia such an employee does not meet the qualification requirements.

When assessing the qualification requirements, it is necessary to think and explain in more detail how to approach individual teaching staff when considering the qualification requirements for work in the kindergarten UNES due to the different functioning of the kindergarten UNES from state and private kindergartens in the Slovak Republic.

2.1 Proposed changes in legislation regarding qualification assurance

The selection of UNES kindergarten teachers corresponds to the focus and goals of the program *The Door of languages unlocked*, and it is understandable that the teachers involved must have a specific profile. It is also inevitable that the program will always need to be supplemented by teachers from abroad. In this case, however, a specific approach must also be taken to assessing their qualifications.

Since programs preparing for work at an early and younger age are not internationally harmonized and do not correspond to the letter of our legislation regulating the teaching profession, they must be assessed individually and with regard to the goals of the program.

The UNES kindergarten teachers coming from abroad were graduates of the following programs or fields (translated into Slovak): pre-primary pedagogy, pre-primary pedagogy with a specialization in English, pre-primary pedagogy and psychopedagogy, primary pedagogy (including work with 5-year-old children), teaching for kindergartens, parenting (all at the higher education level), childhood and family studies.

We would suggest that UNES kindergarten teachers who provide preschool education in English and Spanish do not have to master the Slovak language. We would also suggest that graduates of the above fields of study be recognized as qualified.

The initial qualification is not primarily sufficient for the program, it is far more important to create a learning community of teachers in the kindergarten, which strongly supports this program, in order to create and maintain a teaching team with a common identity and motivation for further professional growth for the benefit of the implemented program.

2.2 Proposed changes in the legislation regarding the possibility of expanding the "The door of languages unlocked" program to other kindergartens

The nature of the program requires specific profiling of the teaching staff who provide it. This results from the orientation of the program on the multicultural dimension of upbringing and education, as well as the related orientation on paedagogics of foreign languages, which is a fixed part of the program. Multicultural and linguistic diversity also requires a multicultural teaching staff and optimally also teachers who are native speakers in the languages offered by the program.

The teaching team is therefore international and the majority of teachers come from a foreign environment, with qualifications obtained in their own country. This fact is connected with the natural phenomenon that foreign teachers do not choose a profession in Slovakia and in particular in one kindergarten as a lifelong goal, they spend a temporary time here and generally work temporarily and for a shorter time in their teaching position in a given kindergarten. This increases the need to train new teachers into the program.

When implementing the program "The Door of languages unlocked", it is necessary to take into account the increased rate of teacher turnover. For this type of program, it is a necessary and natural part of it, which must be reckoned with, it must be actively worked with and its consequences understood in the sense of active work with teachers (and between teachers) as a fixed and direct part of the program.

It would be rewarding for other kindergartens to be able to work according to the program "The Door of languages unlocked" in their kindergarten. However, for that, it would be necessary to change the legislation, specifically so that a kindergarten that would be interested in applying this program does not have to undergo experimental verification. This process is financially expensive and could discourage the kindergarten from being interested in using this program in practice.

However, a given kindergarten that would use the program would have to count with increased turnover of teachers, difficulty in finding teaching staff from abroad, difficulty in implementing the program in practice. However, it would be worth the effort if this program could be used by more kindergartens.