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Form teachers' perceptions of the need for in-service training to manage their students' problematic behaviour

Abstract: This study aimed to identify Slovak form teachers' educational needs to manage their students' problematic behaviour. To this end, a custom questionnaire was developed and offered to form teachers in lower secondary education (ISCED2) and upper secondary education (ISCED3) (N = 266). Their views were then compared based on the type of schools they worked in, their years of experience, and their gender. The Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn's post-hoc tests were then conducted, which revealed significant differences in the educational needs of those with different years of experience and those who work in different types of school: on average, the form teachers with more than 15 years of experience reported a lower need for in-service training than those with less experience, and the form teachers in four-year gymnasiums reported a lower need than the primary school (ISCED2 level) and secondary vocational school teachers (ISCED3 level).

Keywords: *teachers' educational need, form teacher, problem behaviour of students, teacher professional development*

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Scientific paper



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Introduction

Over the last decade, the educational environment in Slovakia and in other European countries has undergone significant changes, the student population has become more diverse (Lew and Nelson 2016) and the teaching profession has become more challenging in the context of increasing student problem behaviour (Vuuren et al. 2018; Emmerová 2022). Teachers often struggle with maintaining discipline and motivating their students, particularly those who exhibit problematic behaviour (Plavšić and Diković 2022). Problematic behaviour is any behaviour that is considered unacceptable by a teacher (Fontana 2003). It is typically inconsistent with social norms, often episodic, and occurs in stressful situations. However, it is yet to be qualified as a behavioural disorder, which means that it lacks persistent dissociative, aggressive, or defiant patterns that last longer than six months (Labáth 2001). Examples of problematic behaviour include disruptive behaviour during lessons, use of vulgar language, cheating, disrespecting the teacher's authority, etc. Stressful situations include, for example, exams and tests, challenging tasks, changes in routine, etc.

Since the mid-1990s, growing concerns have been raised by researchers and education experts about the feminisation of education, with one often-cited issue being the lack of male role models due to the increasing number of female teachers, which may negatively impact boys' achievement and behaviour in schools (Driesen 2007). Factors such as the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's mental health (Kalogeratos 2024), the increasing number of migrant and refugee children, the forced displacement of families (Kawczyńska-Butrym 2021), and the efforts international organizations and governments to introduce inclusive education have significantly diversified the student population (Brown et al. 2012). However, these factors can pose daunting challenges for the contemporary teacher and augment the current challenging situation in schools in relation to the increase in problem behaviour. Moreover, the societal phenomena referred to as the school crisis (Saha 2022), the family crisis (Glenn 2023), the authority crisis (Arendt 1994), the value crisis, and the teaching profession crisis (Vašutová 2004) are also responsible for making the teaching profession more

difficult (Gayazov 2022). As a result of the above-mentioned factors students' behaviour in schools is becoming not only more diverse but also more demanding, with problematic behaviours increasing in frequency as well as intensity – a trend that, alarmingly, shows no signs of slowing down (Morgan and Sideridis 2013; Emmerová 2022). This trend is chief among the reasons many teachers feel exhausted, helpless, and resigned. Novice teachers, in particular, face “onset shock”, with some leaving the profession within a few years (Smith and Ingersoll 2004; Švaříček 2011; Arviv Elyashiv and Navon 2021; Straková and Simonová 2024). One of the significant reasons for this is the difficulty in maintaining classroom discipline (Švaříček 2011; Christofferson et al. 2015; Harris et al. 2019).

Theoretical background

Teachers often encounter a wide range of problematic student behaviours, both externalising and internalising, varying in intensity and frequency (Markkannen et al. 2019; Emmerová 2022; Bilić et al. 2024). However, it has long been perceived by teachers, not only domestically but also internationally, that undergraduate training related to behaviour management is insufficient. Educators have often criticised such training programmes for being overly theoretical and lacking practical applications relevant to real classroom challenges (Šimoník 1994; Cothran et al. 2003; Jones 2006; Vítěčková 2018; Hanuš and Šmídová 2019; McGuire 2022).

The significance of undergraduate training related to behaviour management is elevated by the fact that the teachers who leave the profession often state inadequate training as one of the significant reasons for their departure (Darling-Hammond 2010). Several teachers have reported that they are unprepared to deal with students' problematic behaviours, especially when working with students with exceptionalities in inclusive classrooms (Billingsley et al. 2011; Garland et al. 2013). The most frequent criticism of teacher training is its failure to equip teachers with the necessary skills to manage aggressive, antisocial, or destructive student behaviours (O'Neill and Stephenson 2012).

The graduates of teacher education programmes often highlight the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Hanušová and Šmídová 2019). This concern is related to the composition and conception of training courses: graduates have specifically reported that there is, for example, more emphasis on disciplinary subjects than on subjects of pedagogical-psychological training, or that theoretical disciplines are emphasised while practically oriented subjects are absent (e.g. on solving the various pedagogical situations applicable in practice). Hanušová and Šmídová (2019) also support this concern, revealing a certain level of conservatism in teacher-training faculties, and their findings suggest that these programmes continue to prioritise subject knowledge and theoretical foundations over practical skills, which do not fully align with the actual needs of teachers in the classroom.

The most challenging tasks for teachers are those for which they feel they were inadequately trained during their undergraduate studies. According to Vítečková and Gadušová (2015), the worst perceived preparedness by both Slovak and Czech teachers is in dealing with stressful classroom situations (particularly related to student discipline). Many other studies have also highlighted the continuing need for teachers to receive in-service training for managing student behaviour in classrooms (Baker 2005; Stough and Montague 2014; Markkanen, Annttila, and Välimäki, 2019; McGuire and Meadan, 2023).

A Finnish study on managing challenging situations in interaction with students (Markkanen et al. 2019) found that teachers are unaware of the factors that influence students' behaviour and the effective practices to apply in challenging situations. Teachers must have the necessary skills to recognise students' moods and their state of mind to anticipate and prevent disruptive behaviour before it escalates.

According to several studies, teachers or teacher education students who completed a course on behaviour management subjectively rated themselves as more prepared to manage students' problematic behaviour than others who did not take such a course (Hall and Wahrman 1988; Boe et al. 2007; Alvarez 2007; Kee 2011; McGuire 2022). Westling (2010) also confirmed that classroom management training, whether undergraduate or in-service, predicted high teacher confidence and adequate application of strategies to handle students' problematic behaviours. O'Neil and Stephenson (2012) also confirmed that taking university courses focused on managing students' classroom behaviour was associated with a greater sense of preparedness to manage students' problematic behaviour. However, despite these positive effects of prior training, the respondents in this study (O'Neil and Stephenson 2012) continued to report that the training they received prepared them to manage disruptive, uncooperative, rule-breaking, aggressive, destructive, or disorganised student behaviour only to a certain extent.

It is unrealistic to expect pre-service teacher training to fully prepare future educators for all aspects of classroom practice. When transitioning into the teaching profession, a certain degree of "onset shock" is inevitable. However, if this shock becomes a significant factor contributing to rising teacher turnover, it indicates that undergraduate training programmes must be revised to better align with the realities of educational practice.

As already mentioned, students' problematic behaviour is on the rise, in both research settings and real-world classrooms, with teachers often reporting low self-confidence and feeling underprepared to effectively manage such behaviour (Butler and Monda Amaya 2016; Hepburn and Beamish 2019; Paramita et al. 2020). It is important for teachers to know which strategies for managing problematic behaviour are most effective. Current classroom management research has consistently demonstrated that a preventive approach, which focuses on proactive learning and the reinforcement of expected behaviours, is more effective than a reactive approach, which focuses on addressing the preexisting problematic behaviours (Oliver, Wehby, and Reschly 2011). Teachers' approach to managing student behaviour emphasises the positive reinforcement of student behaviour; it

entails promoting a supportive classroom climate, establishing clear behavioural expectations, and creating a supportive learning environment where teachers help students develop self-regulation. Proactive strategies, are preferred over reactive strategies due to their greater effectiveness (Mitchell, Bradshaw, and Knoff 2013; Wallace, Sung, and Williams 2014, as cited by Vlčková et al. 2019).

Owing to the lack of research on the educational needs of form teachers in relation to students' problematic behaviour, this study aimed to address this research gap. Form teachers are the primary individuals who most often handle students' problematic behaviour. We aimed to explore whether form teachers recognise the need for further education not only in reactive strategies for addressing student behaviour but also in proactive approaches aimed at prevention and positive behaviour management. Since their professional development needs are significantly different, form teachers should not be considered a uniform group (Pavlov et al. 2018). These differences are shaped by multiple factors, including educational background, teaching experience, the type of school in which they work, their career length, and various personal or gender-related characteristics.

Teachers from different types of schools have varying perceived educational needs (e.g. Michek 2016; Ku 2022). The present study focused on school types based on the level and content of the education provided. According to Slovak legislation (Act No. 138/2019), teachers are categorised by the educational level they teach at, including preschool teachers (ISCED0), primary school teachers for lower grades (ISCED1), primary school teachers for upper grades (ISCED2), and secondary school teachers (ISCED3). We examined upper primary school teachers (ISCED2) and secondary school teachers (ISCED3), and among the latter, we further distinguished between those teaching at four-year grammar schools (general education schools) and those at secondary vocational schools. Moreover, we considered the teachers at eight-year grammar schools, who teach at both the lower and upper secondary levels (ISCED2 + ISCED3), as a separate category.

Teachers' educational needs also vary depending on their teaching experience. Novice and experienced teachers have distinct expectations and requirements concerning their professional development, which are shaped by their pedagogical practices and acquired skills (Lazarová 2006; Anggraeni and Rachmajanti 2021). In terms of years of experience, teachers can be classified into three: novice teachers with up to five years of experience, expert teachers with more than five years of experience (with no strict upper limit, as it varies individually), and conservative or burnout-prone teachers in the later stages of their careers (adapted from Průcha 1997; Kasáčová et al. 2010).

Gender may also influence teachers' willingness to pursue further education and their participation in lifelong learning, with female teachers tending to engage in professional development more frequently than their male counterparts (Kovács 2019; Öz 2022). Moreover, differences exist between male and female teachers in terms of their preferred topics for further education (Kovács 2019). Some studies, however, have reported no significant gender-based differences in teachers' educational needs (e.g. Harausová 2014).

Research problem and research questions

The studies presented in the theoretical background of this paper indicate a growing prevalence of problematic student behaviour in schools (Morgan and Sideridis 2013; Emmerová 2022). Many teachers feel unprepared to effectively manage such behaviour (Billingsley et al. 2011; O'Neill and Stephenson 2012; Garland et al. 2013) and often view their pre-service training in this area as insufficient (Cothran et al. 2003; Vítečková and Gadušová 2015; Vítečková 2018). Consequently, they recognise the need for additional education in classroom behaviour management (Baker 2005; Stough and Montague 2014; Markkanen, Anttila, and Välimäki, 2019). Form teachers play a central role in addressing students' behavioural issues (Bukvić 2020); however, there is limited research on their educational needs.

In this study, we aimed to explore form teachers' perspectives on the need for further education in managing students' problematic behaviours and how urgently they perceive the necessity of additional training in proactive and reactive behaviour management strategies, given their varying levels of effectiveness. Since form teachers are not a uniform group and have diverse professional development needs (Pavlov et al. 2018), we expected differences in their perceived educational requirements. This expectation is supported by previous research, which identified variations in teachers' training needs based on the type of school they work in (Michek 2016; Ku 2022), their teaching experience (Lazarová 2006; Anggraeni and Rachmajanti 2021), and gender differences (Kovács 2019; Öz 2022). Grounded in these theoretical insights, we have formulated the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses

- H1: Form teachers from different types of schools have different levels of need for further in-service training in managing students' problematic behaviour.
- H2: Form teachers with different years of professional experience have different levels of need for further in-service training in managing students' problematic behaviour.
- H3: Form teachers have different levels of need for further in-service training in managing students' problematic behaviour based on their gender.

Sample description

The sample (N = 266) included form teachers at the lower secondary level of education (ISCED2; n = 104); four-year gymnasium (4yGS) teachers (n = 49); eight-year gymnasium (8yGS) teachers (n = 17); secondary vocational school (SVS) teachers (n = 84); and form teachers from other secondary schools (conservatories, industrial art schools, sports schools; n = 9). There were 232 (87.2%)

women and 34 (12.8%) men, and their average age was 45.57 years, (SD = 8.946). Based on experience as a form teacher, the largest group comprised those with more than 15 years of experience (N = 107; 40.2%), followed by teachers with six to 15 years of experience (N = 91; 34.2%). The smallest group comprised novice teachers with up to five years of experience (N = 68; 25.6%).

Research instruments

A custom questionnaire, titled 'Educational Needs of Form Teachers', was developed, and its items were designed in collaboration with the research team (Poliaková, Zemančíková et al.) as part of the project Cultural and Educational Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Slovak Republic (KEGA 066UK-4/2021). The questionnaire items were created based on expert discussions between project researchers, with prior theoretical analysis serving as the foundation. Moreover, psychometric principles were followed to ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The questionnaire's initial section included closed-ended questions that aimed to identify the respondents based on their school type, years of experience, and gender (research variables). The main part of the questionnaire comprised scaled questions designed to examine the form teachers' perceptions of their need for further education in reactive and proactive behaviour management strategies (research variables). Each response presented a stimulus, and the respondents rated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale. For example, for the statement "I perceive the need to further educate myself on how to effectively prevent undesirable behaviour in students with special educational needs," the response options were 'Yes'; 'Rather Yes'; 'Neither Yes nor No'; 'Rather No'; 'No'. The questionnaire also had other items that explored various aspects of the teachers' educational needs, though these were not the focus of this study. Readers can find more details about the pilot testing of the developed measurement instrument in Záhorec et al. (2023). Since this was an original questionnaire, its reliability was verified in a pilot test. The overall reliability of the closed-scaled items was measured using the Cronbach's alpha, standardised reliability coefficient, and correlation coefficient. The results demonstrated high internal consistency of the questionnaire, the obtained Cronbach's alpha coefficient value was of 0.992 indicates a high level of reliability (Záhorec et al. 2023). The reliability coefficient in the present study: To evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire items, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated, and the obtained value of 0.935 indicates a high level of reliability.

Data collection process

The data was collected in two phases. The initial phase took place in December 2022, but the number of respondents was insufficient, and the data collection was extended to January 2023. The list of primary and secondary schools in Slova-

kia was obtained from the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information database. Schools were selected proportionally across all the counties of Slovakia, and the participants were selected using the random sampling method, which was performed using the RAND function (online random number generator). The survey was administered electronically, with head teachers serving as intermediaries to invite teachers from the selected schools to participate in the research.

Analysis procedure

During data processing, the results were organised based on the research variables. More clarification is needed for the research variables of form teachers' years of experience and their need for further in-service training.

We categorised the teachers based on the model of teachers' professional careers posited by Průcha (1997), which identifies the stabilisation phase and the emergence of expert qualities after five years of teaching. Three categories were established: the first included novice form teachers with up to five years of experience; the second included experienced form teachers with more than five years of experience (six to 15 years); and the last category included form teachers with more than 15 years of experience (this implies an even higher number of years of experience as a subject teacher, during which they did not concurrently execute the responsibilities of a form teacher), which coincides with the conservative stage of a teacher's professional career. This stage is sometimes linked to professional fatigue and resignation (adapted from Průcha 1997).

Based on Vlčková et al. (2019), we categorised student behaviour management strategies into proactive and reactive. Proactive strategies aim to prevent disruptive and uncooperative behaviour, whereas reactive strategies address the already emerged behavioural issues. The educational needs of form teachers in proactive behaviour management were assessed through the average perceived need for further training in this area. This score was derived from the participants' responses to five scaled questionnaire items, where they rated their need for additional education in specific proactive strategies, including creating a positive classroom climate, establishing classroom behaviour rules, implementing practical prevention strategies, applying universal preventive social-emotional learning programmes, and preventing problematic behaviour in students with special educational needs (SEN). Each response was assigned a numerical value, and the overall perceived educational need was represented by the mean score (M), with higher scores indicating a greater perceived need for further education in proactive behaviour management strategies. The average perceived need for training in reactive strategies was calculated in the same manner as that of the proactive strategies. The teachers were asked to assess their educational needs using a five-point scale across five questionnaire items, where they indicated their interest in further education on topics such as effective approaches to managing existing problematic behaviour, engaging with the parents of students who demonstrate

such behaviour, collaborating with the school support staff, addressing classroom rule violations, and monitoring students with behavioural difficulties.

Data analysis was performed using the JASP statistical software. To evaluate the reliability of the scaled questionnaire items, Cronbach's alpha was used. Moreover, due to the nature of the data distribution, nonparametric statistical tests—the Kruskal-Wallis test, Dunn's post-hoc test, and the Mann-Whitney U test—were used to test the hypotheses.¹

Results

The educational needs of form teachers in managing students' problematic behaviour were categorised into two groups: the need for further training in proactive strategies and the need for further in-service training in reactive strategies. The measured values of the individual indicators for both strategies are detailed in Table 1. The items in this table correspond to specific items in the questionnaire.

Indicators of the educational need for reactive strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation	Indicators of educational need for proactive strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation
Effective approaches to managing existing problematic behaviour	3.86	1.15	Creating a positive classroom climate	3.73	1.22
Engaging with parents of students with behavioural issues	4.04	1.04	Establishing classroom rules	3.30	1.31
Collaborating with SST to solve students' problematic behaviour	4.04	1.05	Implementing practical prevention strategies	3.87	1.16
Dealing with breaches of classroom rules	3.72	1.20	Applying universal preventive social-emotional learning programmes	3.68	1.19
Monitoring students with behavioural difficulties	3.55	1.22	Preventing problematic behaviour in students with SEN	3.82	1.19
Σ mean: Educational needs - Reactive strategies	19.22	4.67	Σ mean: Educational needs - Proactive strategies	18.41	5.05

Table 1: The mean scores of form teachers' educational need for reactive and proactive coping strategies to handle students' problematic behaviour

Note: The mean was calculated based on the responses of 266 respondents. SST: school support team (school psychologist, special pedagogue, social pedagogue, and so on); SEN: special educational needs.

¹ The dataset is available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/q2esz?view_only=6c64e50d76da43b9b5235b836edb56bc

The reported need for further in-service training in reactive strategies slightly outweighed the need for further in-service training in proactive strategies. Of the reactive strategies, the perceived educational needs were reported for engaging with the parents of students with behavioural issues ($M = 4.04$) and with the school support team ($M = 4.04$) and for effective approaches to managing existing problematic behaviour ($M = 3.86$), which appeared to be the most perceived need on average. Among the proactive strategies, form teachers perceived the greatest educational need for implementing practical and effective prevention strategies ($M = 3.87$) and preventing problematic behaviour in students with SEN ($M = 3.82$).

H1: Form teachers from different types of schools have different levels of need for further in-service training in managing students' problematic behaviour.

Form teachers from primary schools (ISCED2 level), SVS (ISCED3 level), 4yGS, and 8yGS were compared. The highest mean scores for the need for further in-service training in both proactive and reactive strategies were obtained from the ISCED2-level teachers, followed by the SVS teachers, and then the 8yGS teachers. The lowest mean scores, which marked the least perceived need for further in-service training, were obtained from the 4yGS teachers (Table 2).

Type of school		N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
Primary schools (ISCED2 level)	Reactive strategies	104	5	25	19.89	4.58
	Proactive strategies	104	5	25	19.13	5.16
SVS (ISCED3 level)	Reactive strategies	84	5	25	19.86	3.95
	Proactive strategies	84	5	25	18.84	4.69
8yGS	Reactive strategies	17	5	25	19.12	5.05
	Proactive strategies	17	5	25	18.65	5.29
4yGS	Reactive strategies	49	5	25	16.84	5.27
	Proactive strategies	49	5	25	16.22	5.06

Table 2: The descriptive statistics of form teachers' need for further in-service training in managing problematic behaviour based on the type of school they work in

Inference: Regarding the statistical significance of the differences in the sub-samples, the distributions of the observed variables (proactive and reactive coping strategies) in the individual sub-samples of teachers—based on school type—did not meet the criterion of a normal distribution for the application of parametric tests (several coefficients of skewness and kurtosis were higher than 1). The nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn's post-hoc tests were thus chosen.

Proactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	Type of school	N	Mean rank	df	Chi-square	p
	ISCED2	104	140.57	3	14.510	.002**
	4yGS	49	92.83			
	SVS	84	130.56			
	8yGS	17	132.35			
Reactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	ISCED2	104	139.52	3	14.836	.002**
	4yGS	49	92.15			
	SVS	84	133.53			
	8yGS	17	126.03			

Table 3: The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test that compared form teachers' educational needs regarding proactive and reactive coping strategies based on type of school they work in

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

	Type of school	z	Mean rank ₁	Mean rank ₂	r _{rb}	p
Proactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	ISCED2 – 4yGS	3.761	140.6	92.8	0.363	<.001***
	ISCED2 – SVS	0.932	140.6	130.6	0.084	.351
	ISCED2 – 8yGS	0.429	140.6	132.3	0.074	.668
	SVS – 4yGS	-2.865	92.8	130.6	0.311	.004**
	SVS – 8yGS	-1.917	92.8	132.3	0.319	.055
	4yGS – 8yGS	-0.092	130.6	132.3	0.021	.927
Reactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	ISCED2 – 4yGS	3.738	139.5	92.1	0.365	<.001***
	ISCED2 – SVS	0.559	139.5	133.5	0.050	.576
	ISCED2 – 8yGS	0.705	139.5	126.0	0.112	.481
	SVS – 4yGS	-3.147	92.1	133.5	0.333	.002**
	SVS – 8yGS	-1.646	92.1	126.0	0.276	.100
	4yGS – 8yGS	0.386	133.5	126.0	0.057	.700

Table 4: The results of the Dunn's post-hoc test's comparisons between form teachers' educational needs regarding proactive and reactive coping strategies based on the type of school they work in

Regarding the need reported for in-service training in proactive coping strategies, significant differences were found between the ISCED2 form teachers ($M = 19.13$) and the 4yGS form teachers ($M = 16.22$). Similarly, significant differences were found between SVS form teachers ($M = 18.84$) and 4yGS form

teachers ($M = 16.22$). In both pairwise comparisons, the 4yGS teachers reported a significantly lower need for further education. The need for in-service training in reactive coping strategies was significantly lower among the 4yGS form teachers ($M = 16.84$) than among the ISCED2 form teachers ($M = 19.89$). Similarly, there were significant differences between the 4yGS form teachers ($M = 16.84$) and the SVS form teachers ($M = 19.86$). The results of the statistical inference Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn's post-hoc tests are presented in tables 3 and 4.

The results support H_1 . Moreover, the pairwise comparisons revealed that, compared to the ISCED2 and SVS form teachers, the 4yGS ones reported the lowest need for in-service training in both proactive and reactive coping strategies.

H2: Form teachers with different years of experience have different levels of need for further in-service training in managing students' problematic behaviour.

Three groups of form teachers with different years of experience were compared. The form teachers with the longest experience (more than 15 years) had the lowest mean scores for the need for further in-service training in both proactive and reactive strategies. Novice form teachers (up to five years of experience) and teachers with six to 15 years of experience had higher mean raw scores (Table 5).

Years of experience		N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation
Up to five years	Proactive strategies	68	5	25	19.00	5.25
	Reactive strategies	68	5	25	19.81	4.72
Six to 15 years	Proactive strategies	91	5	25	19.19	4.37
	Reactive strategies	91	5	25	19.94	3.85
More than 15 years	Proactive strategies	107	5	25	17.36	5.32
	Reactive strategies	107	5	25	18.22	5.12

Table 5: The descriptive statistics of the need for further in-service training based on form teachers' years of experience

Inference: The statistical significance of the differences in the subsamples were measured using the Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn's post-hoc tests. Significant differences in the need for professional development in proactive strategies were revealed between the form teachers with more than 15 years of experience—who, on average, reported a lower need for professional development ($M = 17.36$)—and those with the least experience (up to five years; $M = 19.00$). Similarly, statistically significant differences were found between those with the longest experience

(more than 15 years; $M = 17.36$) and those with six to 15 years of experience ($M = 19.19$).

The results also showed a lower perceived need for further training in reactive strategies among experienced form teachers (more than 15 years of experience; $M = 18.22$) compared to those with the least experience (up to five years; $M = 19.81$) and those with six to 15 years of experience ($M = 19.94$). The results of the Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn's post-hoc tests are presented in tables 6 and 7.

Proactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	Years of experience as a form teacher	N	Mean rank	df	Chi-square	p
	0–5	68	145.8	2	8.452	.015*
	6–15	91	143.9			
	15+	107	116.9			
Reactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	0–5	68	145.1	2	7.077	.029*
	6–15	91	142.7			
	15+	107	118.3			

Table 6: Significant results of the Kruskal Wallis test that compared the need for proactive and reactive coping strategies based on the years of experience as a form teacher

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Proactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	Years of experience as a form teacher	z	Mean rank ₁	Mean rank ₂	r_{rb}	p
	0–5 / 6–15	0.153	145.8	143.9	0.028	.878
	0–5 / 15+	2.431	145.8	116.9	0.205	.015*
	6–15 / 15+	2.472	143.9	116.9	0.212	.013*
Reactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	0–5 / 6–15	0.196	145.1	142.7	0.027	.844
	0–5 / 15+	2.255	145.1	118.3	0.194	.024*
	6–15 / 15+	2.232	142.7	118.3	0.189	.026*

Table 7: Significant results of the Dunn's post-hoc test that compared the need for proactive and reactive strategies based on the years of experience as a form teacher

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The results support H2. Moreover, the pairwise comparisons showed that, on average, form teachers with the longest experience (more than 15 years) reported the least perceived need for professional development in both proactive and reactive strategies compared to those with the least experience (up to five years) and those with six to 15 years of experience.

H3: Form teachers have different levels of the need for further in-service training in managing students' problematic behaviour based on their gender.

We compared the perceived need for teacher training in managing students' problematic behaviours with respect to gender. Owing to the uneven distribution of data in the subgroups studied, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Mean rank	U	<i>p</i>
Proactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	Man	34	17.68	5.902	127.56	3742.00	.630
	Woman	232	18.51	4.916	134.37		
Reactive coping strategies for problematic behaviour	Man	34	19.24	5.223	137.65	4085.00	.736
	Woman	232	19.22	4.597	132.89		

Table 8: The results of the Mann-Whitney U-test that compared the educational need for managing students' problematic behaviour based on the gender of the form teacher

Note. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

These results indicate no significant differences between male and female teachers regarding their need for further in-service training in managing their students' problematic behaviour and thus do not support H3.

Discussion

Form teachers, this study found, strongly emphasise the need for further training in both proactive and reactive strategies for managing their students' problematic behaviours. We found that their level of need for such training differed based on the type of school they worked in and their years of experience, with 4yGS form teachers and those with the longest experience (15 years or more) reporting, on average, the lowest need.

An analysis of the findings on the state of education in Slovakia based on the research conducted between 2017 and 2019 revealed that Slovak teachers, like the teachers in other countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), perceive the management of their students' behaviour in the classroom as challenging. Consequently, they have expressed a strong need

for further professional development in this area and specifically consider it necessary to further educate themselves on how to manage disruptive behaviour in students with SEN (Hall et al. 2019). Our findings support this, with form teachers confirming their need for further in-service training in preventing and dealing with problematic student behaviour. Regarding the effectiveness of strategies for managing problematic behaviour, proactive strategies are preferred over reactive strategies (Mitchell et al. 2013; Wallace et al. 2014 in Vlčková et al. 2019). Our participants indicated the need for further in-service training in both strategies and only with a slight preponderance preferred the need for further in-service training in reactive strategies. Regarding training content, they identified critical areas for professional development, including effective strategies for addressing existing behavioural issues, collaborating with the parents of students with such issues, and collaborating with the SST. Regarding proactive strategies, the participants showed particular interest in improving their ability to prevent problematic behaviour, especially among students with SEN.

The 4yGS form teachers reported the lowest need for further in-service training. These results align with those of previous research, such as Michěk (2016), who found that gymnasium teachers tend to be less motivated about professional development, possibly because the overall incidence of students' problematic behaviour in grammar schools is low compared to its prevalence in primary schools (ISCED2 level) and SVS, which may lead to a lower need for teachers to undertake further in-service training in this area. The low frequency of problematic behaviours among grammar school students has been documented in several studies (Vacek et al. 2008; Lepík et al. 2010; Skopal et al. 2014).

Significant differences were also observed among the form teachers based on their years of experience. Those with the most experience perceived the need for further in-service training less urgently than those with little experience. There are two possible explanations for this finding. First, highly experienced form teachers may feel less inclined towards additional training because of their extensive experience as form teachers and may subjectively perceive that they are satisfied with their existing knowledge. Second, due to professional fatigue, the older age group within this category of teachers might not be as interested in further in-service training as their younger colleagues. Our finding aligns with that of several studies (e.g. Michěk 2016; Kušnířová and Švábřová 2019; The National Institute of Education and Youth in Slovakia – NIVAM 2022). Based on the results of her research, Lazarová (2006) identified the determinants of teachers' motivation for further education, where, among other things, she identified age as a crucial factor. Specifically, she identified several risks associated with older age, such as reduced motivation for continuing education, greater fatigue, the end of one's career approaching, the increased need for rest, and the threat of burnout. Despite the differences, the need for further in-service training regarding content was found to be similar for teachers with different years of experience. According to Karlberg and Bezzina (2020), regardless of whether they are novice or experienced teachers, both groups need further in-service training to handle students

with SEN, deal with students' problematic behaviour, and address the challenges related to educating migrant children.

However, as noted by Pavlov et al. (2018), there is no national education policy that considers the different stages of a teacher's professional career. Teachers range from those starting out to those preparing to leave the profession, and the authors highlighted that, among other things, there are differences in educational needs among them: "Each has different experiences, different development needs, different aspirations, seeks different opportunities for the development, has inherent different levels of motivation for development..., uses formal, informal, and informal opportunities for development to varying degrees (and effectiveness), opportunities for collegial learning, working with professional literature, willingness to experiment, and so on" (Pavlov et al. 2018, pp. 9). We share the authors' view that education policies should prioritise individualised teacher training.

We also compared form teachers' educational needs in managing students' problematic behaviours among based on their gender. We hypothesised that form teachers would differ in their level of need for further in-service training based on their gender. Public opinion often attributes male teachers' authority to have a significant effect on student discipline. Moreover, male form teachers themselves might believe, given their 'male' authority, that they can better manage their students' problematic behaviour and, consequently, might perceive less strongly the need for further in-service training. Our analysis did not reveal any significant differences in form teachers' level of need for further in-service training based on their gender. One possible explanation for this is the composition of our sample: women formed the vast majority of the participants, so the statistical tests may not have been sensitive enough to detect any potential differences. Our finding is consistent with that of Harausová (2014), who also found no gender-based differences among secondary school teachers in their reported need for further in-service training. Similarly, another study did not find that teachers' gender significantly influences student behaviour (Driessen 2007).

This research has several limitations. Since the participants' educational needs were surveyed using a time-consuming research instrument, this could have, instead of supporting deeper reflection, resulted in somewhat schematic responses. Moreover, the questionnaire, the only source of answers to our research questions, and our interpretation of the findings are partly limited by the self-reported nature of the data, potential response biases, and the lack of triangulation with other data sources. The next steps of the analysis thus resulted in the need to complement the findings with a qualitative approach in the form of focus groups with form teachers (the above is already being implemented on an ongoing basis). Moreover, teachers from eight-year grammar schools and other secondary schools (conservatories, sports schools, and industrial art schools)—were not sufficiently represented, and our results regarding this group of teachers cannot be generalised.

Theoretical contributions and practical implications

The professional preparation of teachers is a key focus of expert discussions on reforming pre-service university training programmes. These programmes prioritise subject-specific didactics, educational theory, research methodology, and related fields. However, in practice, the graduates of teacher-training programmes typically do not struggle with subject matter expertise; instead, they often encounter difficulties in managing students' misbehaviour, maintaining classroom discipline, and effectively communicating with the parents or guardians of students with learning and behavioural challenges (Vítečková and Gadušová 2015). These challenges are among the most demanding aspects of a form teacher's role. Presently, there is a lack of research, both in Slovakia and beyond, that specifically examines the educational needs of form teachers. Insights from such research could be valuable not only for pre-service teacher training but also for designing professional development programmes for teachers who have already become form teachers.

Our study helps bridge the gap in theoretical knowledge by providing new insights into the educational needs of form teachers in Slovakia. Our findings have two key implications. First, professional development programmes should be tailored to meet the distinct educational needs of teachers by considering the diverse conditions across the different school types (e.g. different types of problem behaviour and their varying prevalence rates in individual school types) and the varying levels of experience in the specialised role of a form teacher. The insights from this study could contribute to the refinement of teacher education curricula and the design of lifelong learning opportunities for educators. Moreover, educational programmes must be adapted to reflect teachers' evolving professional needs and the increasing complexity of the school environment. Recognising the diverse contexts in which teachers operate, along with their different experience levels, is essential for providing personalised professional development opportunities that effectively address their specific requirements.

Conclusion

The increasing problematic behaviour of students in the context of an educational environment that is increasingly becoming diverse and often more challenging for teachers is a legitimate reason for addressing the question of how to train future form teachers or how to support in-service form teachers through individualised learning programmes. However, training can only be effective if the educational needs of schools and teachers are known (Pavlov 2012). To this end, our research confirmed that form teachers in both primary schools (ISCED2 level) and secondary schools urgently perceive the need for further in-service training to deal with their students' problematic behaviour.

However, in-service training programmes must be individualised, taking into account the type of school in which the teacher works and the specificities related

to the years of their experience. Regarding the pre-service training of future teachers, it must be made more effective in light of the requirements of practice and more practically oriented in terms of content. It also seems useful if experienced practising form teachers are included in pre-service training (Majerová 2011; Hanuš and Smídová 2019).

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STALIŠČA RAZREDNIKOV O POTREBAH PO USPOSABLJANJU ZA OBVLADOVANJE PROBLEMATIČNEGA VEDENJA UČENCEV IN DIJAKOV

Povzetek: Študija ugotavlja potrebe razrednikov po izobraževanju za obvladovanje problematičnega vedenja učencev in dijakov. Vprašalnik so izpolnili razredniki v nižjem sekundarnem izobraževanju (ISCED2) in višjem sekundarnem izobraževanju (ISCED3) na Slovaškem (N=266). Namen raziskave je bil proučiti njihove poglede na nujnost nadaljnjega izobraževanja za obvladovanje problematičnega vedenja učencev in dijakov. Primerjali smo stališča anketirancev iz različnih vrst šol, z različno dolgimi staži in različnega spola. Rezultati Kruskal-Wallisovega testa in Dunnovega post hoc testa so pokazali pomembne razlike v mnenjih med razredniki z različno dolgo delovno dobo in glede na vrsto šole. Razredniki z več kot 15 leti delovnih izkušenj so v povprečju poročali o manjši potrebi po usposabljanju na tem področju kot učitelji z manj izkušnjami. Tudi razredniki v štiriletnih gimnazijah so v povprečju poročali o manjši potrebi po usposabljanju na tem področju kot učitelji osnovnih šol (raven ISCED2) in učitelji srednjih poklicnih šol (raven ISCED3).

Ključne besede: izobraževalne potrebe učiteljev, razrednik, problematično vedenje učencev, profesionalni razvoj učiteljev.

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