

Perceived Discrimination and Self-assessment of Teachers in Slovak Ethnic Schools in Hungary

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Abstract

Education in one's own mother tongue is one of the key areas for maintaining and developing one's own language and ethnic identity of the Slovak minority in Hungary. The aim of the paper is to find out the degree of perceived discrimination of teachers in respect of their work in an ethnic school and the consequent assessment of the teachers' relationships not only from the point of view of themselves, but also from the point of view of their social environment. The paper is based on data from a questionnaire survey conducted in Slovak ethnic schools in Hungary in 2019 on a sample of 139 ethnic school teachers.

In terms of perceptions of discrimination, it can be stated that approximately one-third of the teachers at Slovak ethnic schools have experienced varying degrees of discrimination. The distribution of the results also shows that teachers face discrimination in both urban and rural areas and that discrimination against teachers increases with age. In the context of social comparison, we observed highly positive evaluations of teachers. Slightly more positive evaluations were observed for self-evaluation. The reflected form of teachers' relations reflects both the broader historical and social context, the current situation in the Slovak ethnic education system and the individual-specific characteristics of the respondents.

Keywords: discrimination, social comparison, Slovak teacher, ethnic education, Hungary.

Воспринимаемая дискриминация и самооценка учителей в словацких этнических школах в Венгрии

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Аннотация

Образование на родном языке является одним из ключевых направлений поддержания и развития собственного языка и этнической идентичности словацкого меньшинства в Венгрии. Цель статьи – выяснить степень воспринимаемой учителями дискриминации в связи с их работой в этнической школе, проанализировать последующую оценку учителями данной ситуации не только с точки зрения их самих, но и с точки зрения их социального окружения. Статья основана на данных анкетного опроса, проведенного в 2019 году в словацких этнических школах в Венгрии на выборке из 139 учителей этнических школ.

С точки зрения восприятия дискриминации можно утверждать, что примерно треть учителей словацких этнических школ в той или иной степени сталкивалась с дискриминацией. Распределение результатов показывает, что учителя сталкиваются с дискриминацией как в городских, так и в сельских районах, причём в отношении возрастных педагогов это негативное явление усиливается. Тем не менее, в контексте социального сравнения мы наблюдали и весьма позитивные оценки как со стороны других учителей, так и в самооценке респондентов. Опосредованно характер взаимоотношений учителей отражает и более широкий исторический и социальный контекст, и текущую ситуацию в словацкой системе этнического образования, и индивидуальные особенности респондентов.

Ключевые слова: дискриминация, социальное сравнение, словацкий учитель, этническое образование, Венгрия.

Introduction

Due to the dispersed existence of many ethnic groups in Hungary, including the Slovak minority, and the weakening role of the family in passing on the mother tongue, educational institutions must create conditions for the acquisition and development of the Slovak language and culture (Bindorffer, 2007; Erb & Knipf, 2020). Minority schools are often seen as protection against assimilation (Brubaker et al., 2006). However, as Kolláth (2003) argues, nationality education should provide general and minority-specific knowledge, fostering tolerance and enabling individuals to decide their ethnic affiliation.

Sociological research (Homišínová, 2008) highlights that Slovak students who do not attend Slovak schools often lose their ethnic identity. This identity is shaped by both subjective factors and the broader social, cultural, and historical context. Younger generations of Slovaks in Hungary increasingly use Hungarian exclusively and have weaker connections to Slovak traditions (Homišínová, 2006; Tušková, 2016; Uhrinová,

2016). Census data confirm this trend toward assimilation (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2022).

Family and education are key areas for preserving minority languages (Fang, 2017; Homišinová, 2006; Uhrinová, 2008). The importance of ethnic schools for the preservation of Slovak language in Hungary was also confirmed by an Ombudsman for Minorities investigation in 2011. In the ombudsman's opinion, schools with minority language instruction in Slovak and bilingual schools are not only the most suitable for teaching a foreign language, but also help to create a community based on the transmission of national; in this case a general Slovak culture, or the culture of Slovaks in Hungary, the preservation of their traditions and the organisation of various groups.¹ In this environment, the school thus becomes the most important factor for the preservation of the Slovak language and Slovak nationality in Hungary (Homišinová, 2006; Uhrinová 2008). The question of what political will and activity is needed to change the current situation and tendency is also of relevance. With regard to educational conditions, it is important not to forget the existence and presence of pupils, i.e. whether parents will demand minority education and whether the minority language has sufficient prestige in this environment. Currently, most Slovak families are unable (or only partially able) to pass on the linguistic and cultural heritage of their ancestors to their offspring, and many expect a school to be the only solution to this situation as pupils learn the basics of the Slovak language and encounter Slovak culture at school. Uhrinová (2016) highlights that initial school experiences shape students' lifelong attitudes toward their Slovak identity. Despite these efforts, most students achieve low language proficiency and are unmotivated to continue Slovak education at secondary or university levels. Educational institutions alone cannot resolve this issue, especially as Hungarian dominates family communication. Revitalization requires the minority language to be actively passed from one generation to the next (Gál, 2007).

Theoretical Background

Slovak Education in Hungary – Basic Data

The system of Slovak ethnic schools as a complex phenomenon has not been sufficiently studied and has been mostly reduced to partial research² (Heldáková & Kalistová, 2019; Ďurkovská & Kentoš, 2021; Tušková, 2016). However, the results of research consistently state its crucial role in the life of Slovaks in Hungary and at the same time its current critical, imperilled condition, e.g. Ďurkovská & Kalistová (2020), Loziak (2022), Tušková & Uhrinová (2018).

Weak ethnic identity among Slovak youth reduces motivation to learn Slovak, compounded by the growing demand for other foreign languages like English and German. State policies have historically prioritized Hungarian, leaving a legacy of inadequate Slovak language instruction (Szarka, 2000). This is worsened by insufficient teacher training, limited access to professional development, and outdated Slovak-language textbooks, particularly in science subjects (Hornoková, 2021).

A pressing issue is the aging teaching workforce and the lack of replacements. In many schools, a single teacher handles all Slovak-language responsibilities, leading to burnout and inconsistent teaching quality. Although enrolment in kindergartens

¹ Report on the situation of national and ethnic minorities living on the territory of the Republic of Hungary (February 2009 – February 2011). Budapest, 2011.

² The first comprehensive data on the problems of Slovak education in Hungary were brought only by the project of the Institute of Social Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Research Institute of Slovaks in Hungary (project: Current state and functioning of Slovak national education – reflection of teachers, reflection of students and reflection of parents).

and primary schools has increased, student numbers in Slovak secondary schools and university programs remain critically low. Without sufficient Slovak teachers, the viability of Slovak education is at risk.

In 2021/2022, 30 schools taught Slovak: one monolingual (Budapest), four bilingual (Békéscsaba, Sátoraljaújhely, Szarvas, and Tótkomlós), and 25 teaching Slovak as a subject, a slight decline from 34 in 2018/2019.

Discrimination against Teachers

Discrimination involves unequal treatment based on characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, or age (Hartl & Hartlová, 2004). The Swann Report noted the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the teaching profession, which has since been considered by experts as an urgent issue requiring immediate attention. Its authors McNamara and Basit (2004) referred to the fear of racism, gender stereotypes and negative perceptions of teacher status. According to Osler (1997), racism remains a major barrier that discourages individuals from ethnic minorities from pursuing teaching careers.

The target group of this paper are Slovak teachers in Hungary. The fact that the Hungarian majority perceives the distinctiveness of Slovak teachers as an ethnic group is a normal and natural group-forming process. However, it is not right if this perception of difference turns into unequal treatment. This happens if the difference of a certain ethnicity is associated with prejudice, resulting in stigmatisation or institutional discrimination towards them.

According to the 2019 Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2019) on perceptions of discrimination across European Union countries, 52% of respondents in Hungary think that discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is widespread. The most frequently cited discrimination in Hungary was towards Roma ethnicity, with up to 72% of respondents stating that discrimination based on Roma ethnicity is widespread. Age was considered a common reason for discrimination by 41% of respondents and gender by 33%.

At an individual level, this discrimination manifests itself in the form of perceived discrimination, which is the focus of the research of this study. Perceived discrimination is the subjective feeling among an individual or group that they are being discriminated against based on their race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, or other personal characteristics. These are situations where an individual or group believes that they have been unfairly disadvantaged or treated less favourably compared to others, even though there may be no clear or present objective evidence of discrimination. This feeling can arise in a variety of contexts, such as the workplace, education, health care, and social interactions. Perceived discrimination can significantly affect mental health, self-esteem and overall well-being. Although perceived discrimination may not always correspond with objective reality, it is important to take it seriously as it can influence the behaviour and attitudes of individuals and groups in society (The Ministry of Social Development, 2016, p. 152).

Based on the results of the qualitative research carried out in 2018, we assume that Slovak teachers in Hungary may experience perceived discrimination resulting from the following factors: 1) Language barrier: if Slovak teachers do not speak Hungarian at a high enough level, they may feel isolated or disadvantaged in their communication with colleagues, students and parents; 2) Cultural differences: differences in culture and customs between Slovaks and Hungarians can lead to feelings of alienation or misunderstanding; 3) Professional recognition: Slovak teachers may feel that their professional skills and qualifications are not sufficiently recognised or valued in the Hungarian school system; 4) Social and professional integration: teachers may find it

difficult to integrate into teacher groups and professional networks, which may lead to feelings of discrimination or marginalisation; 5) Access to resources and opportunities: if Slovak teachers feel that they do not have the same access to professional development, training and other opportunities as their Hungarian colleagues, this may contribute to perceived discrimination. These factors can affect their job satisfaction and overall well-being (Homišínová & Ďurková, 2018).

Perceived discrimination can significantly affect their mental health, motivation and professional performance, and addressing these issues requires a sensitive approach from school and educational institutions, which should foster an inclusive environment and provide sufficient support for Slovak teachers.

Self-Assessment of Teachers

Teachers' self-assessment and sense of equality with colleagues significantly influence their professional motivation and effectiveness. Self-assessment refers to how teachers evaluate their competence and achievements, directly affecting their confidence and teaching approach. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to use innovative methods, creating better classroom environments and improving student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

A sense of equality with other teachers is equally important, as teachers often compare themselves with their peers to see where they stand within the professional community. This sense of equality can be a source of motivation but also frustration if teachers feel undervalued or unappreciated compared to their peers. It is therefore important that the school environment promotes equity and fairness, ensuring that every teacher feels that their work and contribution are adequately recognised and valued. In this way, a positive social comparison can be promoted, which contributes to increasing teachers' overall self-esteem and professionalism, and has a positive impact on the education system as a whole.

People automatically engage in comparison, but situational factors such as stress and various changes can temporarily increase the extent of social comparison (Buunk & Gibbons, 2000; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). Such comparisons have variable effects with some research suggesting that when teachers compare themselves to colleagues whose performance is slightly weaker, they feel more tired and lonely, whereas comparing themselves to those who are slightly better increases their sense of self-efficacy in teaching. The results suggest that awareness of such a tendency and the factors that can support teachers' mental and emotional state can improve teachers' performance in classrooms and thus lead to students learning (Saber Gigasari & Hassaskhah, 2017).

According to Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977), self-efficacy reflects individuals' belief in their ability to perform tasks successfully (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 22). Teachers' self-efficacy is reciprocal – successful teaching experiences reinforce their confidence and expectations for future success (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). When teachers view their teaching as successful, their self-efficacy strengthens, raising expectations for future success. Self-efficacy significantly influences teachers' professional behavior (Durksen et al., 2017) and fostering positive, effective classroom behavior (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Teachers with higher self-efficacy are less susceptible to stress and more satisfied with their profession (Gutentag et al., 2018), while their students achieve better academic outcomes and higher motivation (Lazarides & Warner, 2020).

Promoting teachers' self-efficacy and equitable professional environments is vital for sustaining the quality of Slovak minority education in Hungary.

Aim of the paper

The aim of the research was to find out the degree of perceived discrimination of teachers in respect of their work in an ethnic school and the consequent assessment of the teachers' relationships not only from the point of view of themselves, but also from the point of view of their social environment. At the same time, the aim was to show the relationship of socio-demographic factors (age, gender, location, type of school) with perceived discrimination and self-assessment among Slovak teachers in ethnic schools in Hungary.

Research methodology

Our study follows a cross-sectional design. The theoretical background of the quantitative part, including the terms used in the questionnaire, was established through qualitative research. This involved interviews with 10 Slovak teachers in Hungary in 2018, less than a year before the quantitative data collection. The qualitative study focused on clarifying terminology and defining the terms used in the questionnaire. After completing the qualitative research, a guidebook was developed to train all future respondents of the quantitative study. This guidebook was then distributed to every Slovak teacher in Hungary well in advance of the data collection. The guidebook included information on the future research as well as definitions of the terms and issues that were to be the focus of the research.³

The data comes from a questionnaire survey conducted in ten Hungarian counties in 2019 on a sample of 139 teachers (out of a total of 147 Slovak teachers in Hungary) working in 34 ethnic schools. The questionnaire was designed to get a comprehensive picture of the Slovak minority education in Hungary and was carried out in cooperation between the Institute of Social Sciences of the CSPS SAS in Košice, Slovak Republic and the Research Institute of Slovaks in Békéscsaba, Hungary.

To obtain answers about the school system, a number of towns and villages where the research is being conducted were contacted, as well as teachers at all school levels (with the exception of university departments), who were the most qualified to comment on the questions in the questionnaire. As the schools mentioned are scattered throughout the country, the list of schools was obtained with the cooperation of the National Slovak Administration in Hungary. All schools where the Slovak language is taught or schools with Slovak language of instruction participated in the research.

Research population

The selection of respondents was intentional and conducted across towns and villages in 34 schools (of all three types) where Slovak language (henceforth only referred to as the SL) is taught. The criteria for selection were employment (being a teacher teaching the SL or in the Slovak language) and availability of the respondent regardless of identification criteria (age, location, gender). The return rate of the questionnaires (distributed in Slovak language) was almost 95%.

The research population consisted of 11.7% males and 88.3% females. Their mean age was 48.7 years ($SD=10.017$), with a minimum of 24 and a maximum of 68. For females, the mean age was 49.49 ($SD=9.712$), and for males, 43.44 ($SD=10.954$). 7.3% taught at a monolingual school, 48.2% at a bilingual school, and 43.1% at a school where SL is taught as a separate subject. 62% of teachers taught at urban schools, 38% in rural schools. Slovak

³ Homišinová, Ďurkovská (2018). Current state and functioning of Slovak national education in Hungary - (reflection of teachers) - qualitative research. Unpublished material.

nationality was declared by 54%, Hungarian by 18.2% and both Slovak and Hungarian by 27.7% of the respondents.

Methodology

The perception of discrimination of teachers due to their work in an ethnic school was investigated using the question: *Have you ever encountered discrimination due to the fact that you work as a teacher in a Slovak ethnic school?* Teachers had the opportunity to choose their answer on a scale ranging from 1=never and 7=very often.

Subsequently, teachers' self-evaluation was measured by means of social comparison. Self-evaluation reflects the beliefs of its bearer about the attributes of social objects i.e. self. Evaluation by others through the lens of the respondent illustrates the overall picture of relationships from the perspective of the social environment. These evaluations were analysed by a pair of questions: *In your opinion, do your colleagues consider you to be equal? And do you consider yourself to be equal in comparison to your colleagues?* Respondents chose on a scale of 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree.

Statistical analyses

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics methods (Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, Mann-Whitney U test, Kruskal-Wallis H test) in Jamovi 2.5.6. For the age variable, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used due to the nature of the variables. For the gender variable, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used. For the location variable, the Mann-Whitney U test was also used because the independent variable was an ordinal variable. For school type, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was used because the dependent variable was ordinal.

Results

In this part, we present the main results of the paper in four units corresponding to the socio-demographic variables. In the first part we focused on the relationship between perceived discrimination and teachers' self-assessment and age, in the second part we examined them in relation to gender, in the third part in relation to locality and in the fourth part in relation to the type of school.

I. Age

In the first part, we tested for the presence of a relationship between age, perceived discrimination, and teachers' self-assessment using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (see Table 1).

Based on the results, we find that there is a moderately significant positive relationship between the item telling whether the teacher perceives oneself as equal compared to colleagues and the item where the teacher defined the opinion whether colleagues perceive them as equal. Table 1 shows that the more a teacher believes that colleagues consider them as an equal, the more they consider themselves as an equal with other colleagues.

We also looked at perceptions of perceived discrimination by age group. We divided teachers by age into the youngest (24-35 years), middle (36-50 years) and oldest (51-68 years) generations. We found that the youngest (22%) and middle (24%) age groups perceived discrimination almost identically, with the oldest generation reporting the highest level of discrimination (44%). In terms of self-assessment, the distribution of respondents' responses by age group revealed positive assessments of Slovak teachers compared to other teachers. As expected, the self-assessment was more positive.

Table 1. Correlation between age, perceived discrimination and teachers' self-assessment

<i>Correlation items</i>	<i>Your age in 2019</i>	<i>Have you ever encountered discrimination due to the fact that you work as a teacher in a Slovak ethnic school?</i>	<i>In your opinion, do your colleagues consider you to be equal?</i>	<i>And do you consider yourself to be equal in comparison to your colleagues?</i>
Have you ever encountered discrimination due to the fact that you work as a teacher in a Slovak ethnic school?	.209 (.015)	1		
In your opinion, do your colleagues consider you to be equal?	.054 (.537)	-.187 (.030)	1	
And do you consider yourself to be equal in comparison to your colleagues?	.078 (.375)	-.100 (.247)	.661(<.001)	1

Notes: p values are reported in brackets. Significance level after Bonferroni's correction (.05/6) was .008.

II. Gender

In the second part, we compared the perceived discrimination and self-assessment of Slovak language teachers based on gender in the form of a Mann-Whitney test (Table 2). There were no statistically significant differences between any of the groups ($p > 0.05$). In the case of perceived discrimination, we can state that women feel more discriminated against ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.69$) than men ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 1.87$). For the teachers' self-assessment, we analysed two items. Regarding the teachers' opinions on whether they consider their colleagues as equals, we can declare that both men and women answered in the positive range of the scale. However, the mean of women's responses ($M = 6.41$, $SD = 0.88$) was slightly higher than men's ($M = 5.93$, $SD = 2.01$). The second self-assessment item was to determine whether teachers considered themselves as equals. In this case, the responses of both women and men were almost identical – men ($M = 6.68$, $SD = 0.70$), women ($M = 6.59$, $SD = 0.72$).

Table 2. Descriptive characteristics and Mann-Whitney test – Perceived discrimination and self-assessment of teachers based on gender

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>STS</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Have you ever encountered discrimination due to the fact that you work as a teacher in a Slovak school?	male	16	1.75	1.87	1.073	1101.5	.283
	female	121	2.02	1.69			
In your opinion do your colleagues consider you to be equal?	male	16	5.93	2.01	.217	963	.828
	female	117	6.41	.88			
And do you consider yourself to be equal in comparison to your colleagues?	male	16	6.68	.70	-.726	868	.468
	female	119	6.59	.72			

Note: Significance level after Bonferroni's correction (.05/3) was .016.

III. Locality

In the third part, we compared perceived discrimination and teachers' self-assessment based on locality in the form of Mann-Whitney test (see Table 3). There were no statistically significant differences between any of the items. Urban respondents rated themselves as more equal ($M=6.71$; $SD=0.59$) compared to rural respondents ($M=6.43$, $SD=0.88$).

Locality was not significant to the findings regarding the prevalence of perceived discrimination in schools. Both urban ($M=1.98$, $SD=1.75$) and rural ($M=1.98$, $SD=1.66$) teachers declared the same level of perceived discrimination during their work in Slovak schools.

Table 3. Descriptive characteristics and Mann-Whitney test – teachers' perceived discrimination and self-assessment based on locality

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Have you ever encountered discrimination due to the fact that you work as a teacher in a Slovak school?	urban	85	1.98	1.75	2205	.981
	rural	52	1.98	1.66		
In your opinion, do your colleagues consider you to be equal?	urban	82	6.44	1.10	1814	.136
	rural	51	6.22	1.04		
And do you consider yourself to be equal in comparison to your colleagues?	urban	84	6.71	.59	1798	.048
	rural	51	6.43	.87		

Note: Significance level after Bonferroni's correction (.05/3) was .016.

IV. Type of school

In this part, we compared teachers' perceived discrimination and self-assessment based on the type of school (Table 4). We used the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test. There were no statistically significant differences between the groups on any of the items examined. Within the groups, teachers in monolingual schools in Budapest felt the least discriminated against ($M=1.40$; $SD=1.26$), and teachers in schools where Slovak language is taught as a subject felt the highest level of perceived discrimination ($M=2.18$; $SD=1.83$).

Table 4. Descriptive characteristics and Kruskal-Wallis test – perceived discrimination and self-assessment of teachers based on the type of school.

		<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Test statistic</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Have you ever encountered discrimination due to the fact that you work as a teacher in a Slovak school?	monolingual	10	1.40	1.26	2.359	2	.307
	bilingual	67	1.90	1.65			
	SL as a subject	60	2.18	1.83			
In your opinion, do your colleagues consider you to be equal?	monolingual	10	6.60	.52	.958	2	.619
	bilingual	66	6.37	1.20			
	SL as a subject	57	6.28	1.01			
And do you consider yourself to be equal in comparison to your colleagues?	monolingual	10	5.56	.48	3842	2	.146
	bilingual	66	4.41	.54			
	SL as a subject	59	5.02	.90			

Note: Significance level after Bonferroni's correction (.05/3) was .016.

In the case of self-assessment, teachers in monolingual schools scored the highest both in their opinion of whether their colleagues consider them equal ($M=6.60$, $SD=0.52$) and in their assessment of whether they consider themselves equal ($M=5.56$, $SD=0.48$). The second item focusing on the analysis of teachers' self-assessment to find out the opinion whether the teacher considers himself/herself as equal to other colleagues was interesting depending on the type of school. While all teachers responded on the positive range of the scale, the differences based on school type were more pronounced. As mentioned above, while monolingual school teachers scored the highest, teachers in bilingual schools scored the lowest ($M=4.41$, $SD=0.54$).

Discussion

Perceived discrimination

In the context of the results of the 2019 Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2019), which showed that 52% of respondents in Hungary think that discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity is widespread, we focused on perceived discrimination against Slovak teachers in Hungary. Minority education is often considered problematic. Approximately one-third of minority school teachers have experienced varying degrees of discrimination, with other ethnicity / other nationality being one of the most common reasons for discrimination (D'amico et al., 2017). In the context of the complicated nature of international Slovak-Hungarian relations resulting from the history of both nations, Slovak ethnic education in Hungary faces even greater challenges.⁴ The aforementioned Eurobarometer survey analysed discrimination based on age, where 41% of respondents considered this factor as a reason for discrimination, and gender was mentioned as a reason for discrimination by 33% of the respondents. The results of our research probe correspond with the Eurobarometer survey results, as the oldest age category of Slovak teachers in Hungary (51–68-year-olds) reported the highest level of perceived discrimination, 44%.

The influence of age on teacher perceived discrimination involves multiple factors. Firstly, there is the age of teachers, i.e. the attitudes of teachers of different ages towards the topic of discrimination. The second is the cohort effect. That is, the influence of factors to which that particular generation of teachers is exposed, such as different social and economic conditions. In this case, age is only a correlate of the above experiences. The third factor is the effect of specific events, such as the economic crisis or the digital transformation, which affect different age groups, on a one-off basis, but with different impacts on different age groups. The research was designed as a cross-sectional survey, i.e. all age groups were interviewed at the same time. Due to the research design, however, it is not possible to assess the cohort effect and the event effect.

Gender is also mentioned as one of the most frequent reasons for discrimination by Hartl and Hartlová (2004) and in this context, female Slovak teachers in Hungary are more discriminated against (35%) than men (19%). This fact must be seen in the context of the percentual predominance of women among Slovak teachers in Hungary (88.3%). This, combined with the low status of teaching, may discourage the younger generation from entering the profession, endangering Slovak ethnic education's future.

⁴ Challenges may include: increasing the number of pupils in monolingual and bilingual schools; encouraging pupils' interest in studying the Slovak language and creating a positive attitude towards the language; maintaining pupils' interest in acquiring the Slovak language at a level that allows for considered and fluent communication. In addition, it is very important to increase the interest of secondary school students in Budapest and Békéscsaba in university education and to attract both professionally qualified young teachers with a high level of proficiency in the Slovak language and professionally trained teachers, as well as to provide modern textbooks in the Slovak language.

We suggest that the low number of new teachers in Slovak ethnic education in Hungary may result from causes similar to those identified by McNamara and Basit (2004) and Osler (1997) in Britain, such as the fear of racism, gender stereotypes, and negative perceptions of the teaching profession's status.

It is also clear from the distribution of the results of our research that teachers in both *urban and rural areas* face perceived discrimination, and that discrimination against teachers increases with increasing age. The above distribution also corresponds to *the type of schools*; therefore, perceived discrimination is equally present in bilingual schools as in schools teaching the minority language as a subject. An exception to this is the occurrence of perceived discrimination in monolingual schools in 10% of cases.

The forms and causes of perceived discrimination are beyond the scope of the research presented here and need more attention in the future.

Self-assessment

There are more possibilities how to approach the operationalization of teacher relations. One of the classic ways is to ascertain the state of relationships through self-assessment or evaluation by others, i.e. – teachers' mental representations of themselves and of others about themselves. Self-assessment reflects the beliefs of its bearer about the attributes of social objects i.e. self. Evaluation by others through the respondent's lens illustrates the overall picture of relationships from the point of view of the social environment. Grabowski and Broemer (2014) suggested that self-assessment is enhanced by the existence of social comparison with superior group members. In the case of this study, the focus was on the individual, as well as conveyed group reflection on the issue under study. In relation to the social comparison of Slovak teachers in Hungary, we observed highly positive evaluations of teachers in all comparisons (locality, gender, age, school type), which in the vast majority of cases ranged between a scale score of 6 and 7. Respondents generally assigned higher scale scores to the option "I consider myself equal to my colleagues". The option "colleagues consider me equal" scored lower. According to Saber Gigasari and Hassaskhah (2017) the degree of social comparison may be influenced by the need for self-improvement. In our research, however, the reflected form of educators' relationships reflects both the broader historical and social context, the current situation in Slovak ethnic education, and the individual-specific characteristics of their bearers.

Conclusion, implications for further research, limitations

Perceived discrimination among teachers in ethnic schools is a significant issue with potentially far-reaching implications for education and the working environment. Addressing this matter requires proactive measures and the engagement of all stakeholders, including educational authorities, teachers, students, and the community. Implications for further research primarily focus on collecting data related to perceived discrimination among teachers. As the forms and causes of discrimination extend beyond the scope of the research presented here, it would be advisable to conduct semi-structured interviews with teachers in the future, focusing specifically on the forms, causes, and associated aspects of discrimination. This approach would allow for an exploration of the psychological and emotional impacts of perceived discrimination among teachers on their professional lives and personal well-being. It would also help identify aspects that could inform improved policies and solutions.

The benefit of the study is that almost all teachers teaching Slovak or in Slovak (139 out of 147) at ethnic schools in Hungary took part in the survey. The uniqueness of this research lies in the statements of almost all teachers who speak Slovak or teach Slovak

(with the exception of 8 teachers), so these results comprehensively map the state of almost the entire Slovak minority education in Hungary and draw attention to current issues and challenges. The above findings can thus be characterised as representative with regard to the number and representation of teachers.

This study has some limitations. These include the omission of the item “length of service” from the questionnaire and the impossibility to compare the correlation between the length of service and teachers' discrimination. The authors are also aware of the ceiling effect found in the data – considering some items, the mean values on the 1-7 scale reached even 6.5. However, due to the high representativeness of the sample, this fact corresponds to reality. A certain limitation to the analysis is the unequal distribution of the respondents in terms of the respective institutions, as well as the gender structure of the respondents; however, this reflects current conditions.

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