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## **PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION TEACHER PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES IN SLOVAKIA – POLAND. COMPARISON**

### **Abstract<sup>1</sup>**

The author of the study presents the results of international comparative research focused on teacher professional activities. Profesiographic research was focused on capturing the professional activities of teachers of primary and pre-primary education. The study presented research findings from pre-primary teacher in Slovakia – Poland compared.

**Keywords:** pre-primary education teacher, professionographic research, professional activities.

### **AKTYWNOŚĆ ZAWODOWA NAUCZYCIELI EDUKACJI PRZEDSZKOLNEJ NA SŁOWACJI I W POLSCE. PORÓWNANIE**

#### **Streszczenie**

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki międzynarodowych badań porównawczych skupiających się na aktywności zawodowej nauczycieli. Badania profesjograficzne były skoncentrowane na aktywności zawodowej nauczycieli edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej. Porównano wyniki pracy nauczycieli edukacji przedszkolnej na Słowacji i w Polsce.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauczyciele edukacji przedszkolnej, badania profesjograficzne, działalność zawodowa.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Mgr. Peter Jurčík.

## Introduction

Kosová<sup>2</sup> states that for the last forty years the teaching profession has been undergoing very turbulent transformations. These transformations were encouraged by many researches focusing on deeper insight into the teaching profession and teacher's personality, which are considered to be the part and parcel of developing the pedagogical knowledge. The teachers' profession and education of teachers are the primary topics of debate over education throughout the world<sup>3</sup>. Within the project titled „The Profession of Pre-school Teacher and Primary School Teacher within a Dynamic Concept" we focus on recording the professional activities of the pre-school and primary school teacher. The research is conceived as a professiographic research and during its preparation stage we focused on the analysis of the researches completed so far, which deal with the profession of a teacher. The substantial part of the study is dealing with the characteristics of a professiographic research performed in Slovakia and the following interpretation of the collected data with focus on the profession of the pre-primary school teacher.

## Professiographic research

The effort of the expert public to cover and record the teacher activities on various education levels lead to researches focused on developing a professiogram and professiography of a teacher on the constituent education levels<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> B. Kosová, Profesionalizácia učiteľskej profesie, [w:] B. Kasáčová, M. Cabanová (red.), *Učiteľ v preprimárnej a primárnej edukácii. Teória, výskum, vývoj*, Banská Bystrica 2009, p. 9-20.

<sup>3</sup> A. Seberová, *Učiteľská profesie v primárním vzdělávání pohledem pedagogického výzkumu v České republice*, [w:] B. Kasáčová, M. Cabanová (red.) *Učiteľ v preprimárnej a primárnej edukácii. Teória, výskum, vývoj*, Banská Bystrica 2009, pp. 203-218.

<sup>4</sup> M. Kurelová, *Od profesiografie učitelů ke standardu učitelské profesie*. Ostrava, 2004.

Since the half of the 20th century many scientists focus in their researches on investigating the teacher qualities from the perspective of several characteristics. These researches prove that teachers' quality is one of the most important factors, which influence the school successfulness of students<sup>5</sup>. And one of the methods for detecting the quality of a teacher is *professiography*. „Professiography is an intersection of the social and qualification level within the *professiographic* research. The main goal of these researches is to create a *professiogram* using the *professiographic* methods. A *professiogram* is a fixed form of a disposed characteristic of a specific profession based on physiological, psychological and other types of knowledge”<sup>6</sup>. *Professiography* of the teaching profession deals with the analysis of the teachers' specific professional activities. It seeks to record at what time and for how long the particular activities are being performed and what load is being put on the experts to cope with them. It is a topical issue on the field of *pedeutology*, which through the research methods and techniques can help monitoring the changes in the profession and revealing the causes of other phenomena, such as strain, stress, failure etc.<sup>7</sup>.

### **Professiographic Research on the Profession of Pre-Primary Education Teachers Conducted in Slovakia**

Within the research aim of the APVV-0026-07 project with the title *The Profession of Pre-School Teacher and Primary School Teacher within a Dynamic Concept* we focus on creating a *professiography* and *professiogram* of a teacher in pre-primary

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<sup>5</sup> L. Darling-Hammond, *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence*, Education Policy Analysis Archives 2000, nr. 1. <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1>, [26.02.2016].

<sup>6</sup> B. Kasáčová, *Výskum učiteľskej profesie-reflexia, perspektívy a výzvy*, [w:] B. Kasáčová, M. Cabanová (red.) *Profesia učiteľa v preprimárnej a primárnej edukácii v teórii a výskumoch*. Banská Bystrica, 2009, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> M. Kurelová, *Od profesiografie učitelů ke standardu učitelské profese*, Ostrava, 2004.

and primary education. The goal of the research is to do a basic research into the professional activities within the work of a pre-primary and primary school teacher.

### **The Research Basis and Objectives**

The research is aimed at examining and mapping of teacher's professional activities. We intend to do a basic research into the professional activities in the work of teachers in pre-primary and primary education in context with the declared and required teacher competences and capabilities defined in the profession standards, as well as in the context with the developmental trends of this profession (both international and national documents). The goal of the project is to identify and characterize specific activities of pre-primary and primary education teachers and within this context to point out the importance of understanding and perceiving the teaching profession as an expert professional occupation.

### **Methodology of the Project Solution and the Basis for Creating the Research Tool**

When forming the project methodology, we based our approach on the understanding that teachers should too possess a certain research competence. Seberová<sup>8</sup> sees the research competence as a metacompetence, since it bears the potential to ensure the quality and development of all the partial competences, including the reflexive and diagnostic ones.' Research competences are closely connected with the ability of the teacher to gain objective information during his/her teaching practice and verify them consecutively. Since we conceived the research as a Participatory–Action Research (further as PAR only), we believe the research must necessarily apply the teacher's diagnostic and research competences, which are imperative for a research focusing on this topic. Within the participatory–action research we want to observe the everyday teaching practice, while focusing on teachers activities. We base our research on a thesis that the causal judgments about the

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<sup>8</sup> A. Seberová, *Výzkumná kompetence v učitelské profesi a ve vzdělávání učitelů*, Ostrava, 2006, p. 55.

behavior of the human beings are more reliable, if the people in question are participating in their creation and testing. This research model gives more power to the individual by allowing them to realize they are able to indentify their own needs and create practical and durable solutions. Within this research we focused on capturing professiographic images in three phases, during the workweek, even after 4-00 PM and during weekends.

When creating the research tools, we used the drafts of the legislative standards and regulations, which are already in force these days.

- *Teachers' competence profile in Slovakia*, which specifies the teachers' competences in three dimensions and includes the competences focused on: the pupil; education process and teacher self-development<sup>9</sup>.
- *The Professional Standards of Pre-Primary Education Teachers*, which follow up on the competence profile of teachers in Slovakia. The draft of the professional standard reflects the qualification requirements for the performance of the pre-school teacher profession. Professional standard is a norm, which specifies the professional competences necessary for the standard performance of a pedagogic employee profession. It is the pillar in the process of the pedagogic employee professionalization, which serves as the fundament for the profile of a university graduate, of the professional and career development and the criteria of assessment and remuneration of a pedagogic employee. It acts as a quality criterion within the educational programs in schools and schooling facilities. It is expressed in a system of provable competences consisting of the teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes. The professional standards of teachers in schools and schooling facilities are formed by the general professional standards and the school professional standards<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> B. Kasáčová et. al., *Profesijný rozvoj učiteľa*, Prešov, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> I. Pavlov, M. Valica, *Profesijný rozvoj učiteľov v kariérom systéme*, [w:] *Profesijný rozvoj učiteľa*, Prešov, 2006, p. 98.

### The Characteristics of the Research Tool

The profession of a teacher has undergone a lot of research, both in Slovak, as well as international context. Based on a deeper analysis of the present, mainly professiographic researches, treated in detail by Seberová, A.<sup>11</sup> in the Czech Republic; Tabačáková, P., Babiaková, S.<sup>12</sup> in Slovakia and Hanesová, D.<sup>13</sup> in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and being familiar with the current conditions within the Slovak education reality, we used the APVV-0026-07 project for preparing the research tools, which are briefly described below. The primary method of the performed research was the **method of the captured daily images for the time analysis of the work activity** focused on auto-observation connected with the continuous and retrospective recording of the time duration of the work activities within the profession, on and off the job. The specialized literature did not provide any valid or suitable tool for capturing the professional activities of the pre-primary education teachers. That is why we decided to develop our own research tool. At the beginning, we used the competence profiles of the performance standards to specify the particular professional activities, which can be observed within the education practice. **The sheet for the professiography of the pre-primary education teacher** is the essential part of the research tool battery and contained the following professional activities (a1 – AF indicates an activity and the accompanying number shows the position of the activity within the sheet for the professiography Table 1).

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<sup>11</sup>A. Seberová, *Učiteľská profesie v primárnom vzdelávaní pohľadom pedagogického výzkumu v Českej republike*, [w:] B. Kasáčová, M. Cabanová (red.) *Učiteľ v preprimárnej a primárnej edukácii. Teória, výskum, vývoj*, Banská Bystrica 2009, pp. 203-218.

<sup>12</sup> P. Tabačáková, S. Babiaková, *Teoretické východiská profesiografie a tvorba výskumného nástroja*, [w:] B. Kasáčová, M. Cabanová (red.) *Učiteľ v preprimárnej a primárnej edukácii. Teória, výskum, vývoj*, Banská BYstrica, 2009, pp. 179-202.

<sup>13</sup> D. Hanesová, *Výskumy o učiteľoch a profesionalizácii učiteľského povolania: bibliografia*, [w:] B. Kasáčová, M. Cabanová (red.) *Učiteľ v preprimárnej a primárnej edukácii. Teória, výskum, vývoj*, Banská BYstrica, 2009, pp. 219-250.

**Table 1.** Activities for the profesiography of the pre-primary education teacher

<b>Graphic abbreviation</b>	<b>Professional activities</b>
<b>Category A – Activities Directly Connected with Education Activities and Their Preparation</b>	
a1	Programming and Planning Educational Activities
a2	Ensuring and Organizing the Conditions for the Educational Activities
a3	Activities to Promote the Pupil's Activation and Motivation
a4	Performing and Managing the Educational Activities in the Internal Environment of the Nursery School
a5	Setting up and Solving Educational Situations
a6	Performing and Managing Educational Activities Outside the Nursery School
a7	Performing and Managing the Educational Activities and Games Outdoors on the Nursery School Grounds
a8	Assessing the Children and their Products
a9	Individual Care for Children with Special Educational Needs
a10	Preparing and Creating Teaching Materials and Aids
<b>Category B – Other Activities Connected with Education</b>	
a11	Activities Connected with Diagnosing the Children
a12	Meeting and Cooperating with Parents
a13	Completion of Pedagogical Documentation
a14	Consultation regarding the children and educational activities with teachers and other experts
a15	Consultation Sessions and Meetings in the Nursery School
a16	Helping the Children with Activities Connected with Self-Care and the Daily Regime
a17	Supervision during the Children's Self-Reliant Activities, Games and Resting Time
<b>Category C – Activities Arising from Other Teachers' Functions</b>	
a18	Working in Cooperation with Methodological, Consultative and Other School Bodies
a19	Library Management
a20	School Hobby Club Management
a21	Maintaining the School Chronicle, Album etc.
a22	Teachers' Study/Classroom Management

<b>Category D – Education and Self-Culture</b>	
a23	Participation in Education
a24	Self-Study
a25	Teaching other Colleagues
aE (a26)	Out-of-School and Public Activities Connected with the Profession
aF (a27)	Other Activities

Source: own processing.

The research tool – professiography sheet was divided into six key categories. Four of the categories consisted of the formulated professional activities with the instructions to fill in the number of minutes in the relevant time interval. The interval was delimited by the daily hours. The activities a1 – a25 under the A–D categories are labeled as the standard professional activities.

We realized that when doing their daily recordings, the respondents could be missing some of the professional activities. That's why they could freely add an activity worthy of registration under the F (a27) category „other activities”. The data gained underwent content analysis and were categorized according to the content similarity in relation to the profession. The method of content classification and categorization was applied also in the E (a26) category „out-of-school and public activities connected with the profession”. The professional activities of teachers presented in the aE (a26) and aF (a27) activities are seen as non-standard activities.

The insiders were asked to estimate and record the number of minutes spent on the professional activities during a day. The presented numerical data represents the estimated average time periods for the particular categories (workday, working week, Saturday, Sunday, etc.) calculated using the sum of minutes supplied by all the respondents in all the three research phases.

The processed data was collected using the auto – observation sheets – each of these included 27 activities in lines and under 9 columns; there were 8 time limited 1-hour segments



(from 7.00 am-4.00 pm) and after 4-00 pm the time was freely allocated until late evening. Thus each day of the research allowed the recording of 243 items of nominal data. Logically, not each of the recordings contained all positive data. If the activity was not performed the data equaled zero. Every respondent supplied 14 sheets. This should give an idea of the volume of data with which we had to cope.

### **Comparing the findings of the research into the professional activities of Slovak and Polish pre-primary education teachers**

Besides Slovakia, the research was also carried out in the Czech Republic and Poland. The partial findings under the national parts of the research have been continuously published throughout the research period. Herein, we would like to present a comparison of the findings acquired from the Slovakia and Poland.

**Table 2.** The Overview of the Active Participants in the Particular Periods and Countries

	<b>1st period</b>	<b>2nd period</b>	<b>3rd period</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>PRE-PRIMARY SR</b>				
No. of Participants	113	84	82	279
<b>Total - N SK</b>	<b>279</b> respondents			
<b>PRE-PRIMARY PL</b>				
No. of Participants	50	50	48	148
<b>Total - N PL</b>	<b>148</b> respondents			

Source: own processing.

Towards the last phase, the development of the research set tended to decrease slightly. Measures to maintain the sample size across all the research stages differed within the national

research teams: the sample of the Slovak group was kept compact by the educated group of the main „multiplication probands” that simultaneously attended the course of the methodological and theoretical training for the research. They could also work together to solve the continuously emerging difficulties. The Polish group was very stable and consisted of teachers attending a group of continual education, a group very keen on researching. The following table presents the overview of the research participants from the pre-primary education teachers based on the length of their teaching experience.

**Table 3.** The Research set of Pre-Primary Education Teachers from Slovakia and Poland Based on the Length of their Teaching Experience

<b>Length of the teaching experience</b>	<b>Slovakia SK</b>	<b>Poland PL</b>
up to 10	65	50
<10.20)	45	50
<21.30)	117	48
<30 and more	50	0
not stated	2	0
Total	279	148

Source: own processing.

The overview clearly shows that the largest group in Slovakia is formed by the pre-primary education teachers with the length of the teaching experience of <21.30) years and the lowest number of teachers are those with more than 30 years of experience.

We also dealt with the topic of the seasonality of the teachers' performance in these countries. We compared the average weekly working time of the structured, as well as of all the professional activities. In table 4 we present the average time load of the respondents according to the countries, during an average working week, as well as the levels of significance between the particular phases.

**Table 4.** Seasonal Differences in the Average Weekly Times Spent on the Professional Activities According to the Particular Countries

	Spring phase	std. dev.	Autumn phase	std. dev.	Winter phase	std. dev.	Differences			test
							Spring/Autumn	Spring/Winter	Autumn / Winter	
<b>POLAND</b>										
<b>Workweek a1-aF (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)</b>	1612	791.9	1612	791.9	1594	612	0	18	18	P = 0.92410
<b>Hr / week (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM)</b>	25.98		26.45		27.15		-0.47	-1.17	-0.70	
<b>Workweek a1-a25 (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)</b>	1561	790.8	1561	790.8	1540	645.1	0	21	21	P = 0.93571
<b>Hr / week (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM)</b>	26.01		26.01		25.67		0.00	0.34	0.34	
<b>SLOVAKIA</b>										
<b>Workweek a1-aF (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)</b>	2232	1041.9	2050	953.6	1834	873.5	181	398	216	P = 0.03829 *
<b>Hr / Week (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM)</b>	37.19		34.17		30.57		3.02	6.62	3.60	
<b>Workweek a1-a25 (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)</b>	2129	1008.7	1928	808.7	1834	873.5	201	295	95	P = 0.07250
<b>Hr / Week (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM)</b>	35.49		32.14		30.57		3.35	4.92	1.57	

Source: own processing.

The Slovak pre-primary teachers faced the highest time load during the spring phase of the research. The pre-primary teachers from Poland recorded the same level of time load when performing all of the professional activities during the spring and autumn phase. In Poland, we did not detect any statistical significance depending on the phases of the research and we can confirm that the time load of a Polish teacher is actually equal. However, the Slovak teachers are influenced by the season of the year. The seasonality affects the performance of the Slovak pre-primary teachers are affected when considering all of the professional activities a1-aF. With respect to the volume of the collected data, we would like to note that seasonality influences the time load of the Slovak pre-primary teachers when reflecting all ( $P=0.01560^*$ ), as well as only the standard professional activities ( $P=0.34640^*$ ) throughout the working week.

We were also interested in the statistically significant differences within the work load of teachers in all the three countries during the workdays.

We have been monitoring all the performed professional activities a1-aF, since the out-of-school, public and other activities that are not performed on a daily basis could cause the differences between the particular workdays. There are no significant differences for the Polish teachers for the particular workdays. The Slovak pre-primary teachers show a significant difference in their work performance between Friday and all the other weekdays, except for Thursday.

We also focused on comparing the average performances of the teachers in all three countries in relation to the length of their teaching experience. It is interesting to observe the load of the pre-primary education teachers depending on the length of their teaching experience. We found that in Slovakia the teachers with <10-20) years of experience face the highest time load. In Poland, it is the teachers with <21-30) years of experience that have to cope with the highest time load in their performance.

**Table 5.** Statistically Significant Differences within the Time Load of Teachers when Performing The Activities a1-aF During The Workdays in Poland and Slovakia

	a1-aF (07.00 AM - 04.00 PM)	N	mean	std. dev.	mean	std. dev.	mean	std. dev.	mean	std. dev.	mean	std. dev.
			work. time (min)									
<b>POLAND</b>	<b>Monday</b>	148	321.8	151.2	321.3	154.9	327.5	160.2	315.4	158.5	322	159.6
	<b>Tuesday</b>	148										
	<b>Wednesday</b>	147										
	<b>Thursday</b>	148										
	<b>Friday</b>	148										
<b>SLOVAKIA</b>	<b>Monday</b>	277	430.9	204.8	419.4	200.7	419.3	196.9	408.7	200.8	399.5	233.8
	<b>Tuesday</b>	279										
	<b>Wednesday</b>	277										
	<b>Thursday</b>	276										
	<b>Friday</b>	274										

Source: own processing.

**Table 6.** The average performance of professional activities during the working hours in relation to the length of the teachers' teaching experience

	Length of the Teaching Experience - Interval	< 10 N=54	std. dev.	[10.20) N=22	std. dev.	[20.30) N=90	std. dev.	> = 30 N=27	std. dev.
POLAND	Working Week a1-aF (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)	1330	575.9	1252	417.8	1894	879.7	1519	645.8
	Hr / Week	22.2		20.9		31.6		25.3	
	Working Week a1-a25 (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)	1325	574.9	1242	422.7	1812	906.3	1519	645.8
	Hr / Week	22.1		20.7		30.2		25.3	
SLOVAKIA	Length of the Teaching Experience - Interval	< 10 N=54	std. dev.	[10.20) N=34	std. dev.	[20.30) N=107	std. dev.	> = 30 N=55	std. dev.
	Working Week a1-aF (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)	2182	1180.5	2249	1015.8	2076	1121.1	2046.3	840.2
	Hr / Week	36.4		37.5		34.6		34.1	
	Working Week a1-a25 (7.00 AM - 4.00 PM) (min)	2099	1113.7	2113	851.6	1989	1061.3	1901	809.3
Hr / Week	35.0		35.2		33.2		31.7		

Source: own processing.

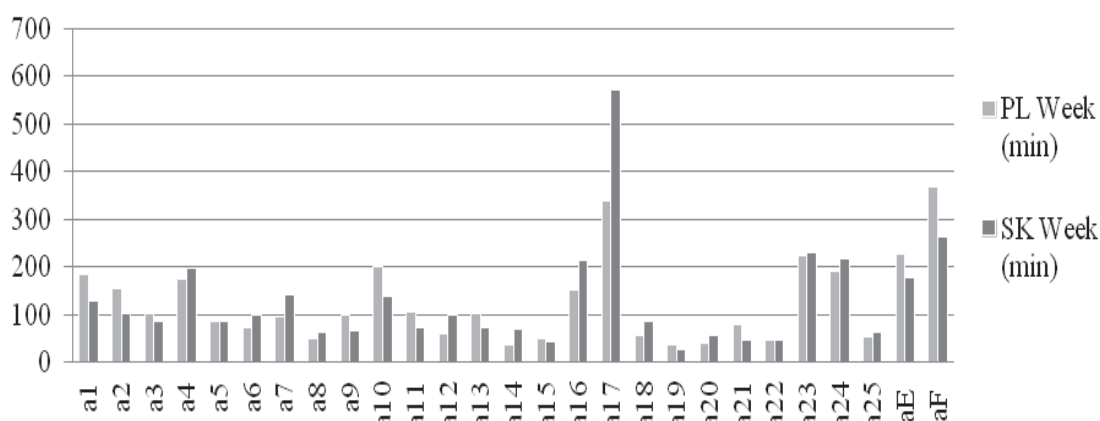
The statistically significant differences became apparent between the average times of the workdays when reflecting all of the professional activities a1-aF, depending on the length of teaching experience of the Polish teachers. The statistically significant differences depending on the length of teaching experience of the Polish teachers reached the highest level of

significance on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; the medium level of significance was recorded on Wednesday. In case of the Polish pre-primary education teachers, the statistically significant differences, when reflecting all of the professional activities a1-a25, registered their highest level of significance on Monday, the medium level of significance was reached on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday ( $P=0.00164^{**}$ ) and the lowest level of significance was reported for Wednesday.

For the Slovak teachers, we did not notice any significant differences between the average times during the workdays depending on the length of the teaching practice. This means that the average performance within all the four groups of Slovak probands is not significantly different during the particular weekdays.

We can use the graphic indication of the time spent on the performance of the particular professional activities in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia to describe the differences between the times spent on their performance throughout the week.

**Chart 1.** Average Times of all Professional Activities Performed by The Pre-Primary Education Teachers throughout The Week in Poland and Slovakia



Source: own processing.

When comparing the average times for the respective professional activities, the country specifics become obvious. The Polish teachers spend more time on programming and planning

educational activities (a1), preparing and creating the teaching materials and aids (a10), maintaining of the school chronicle, album etc. (a21), teachers' study/classroom management (a22), as well as on activities aE and aF.

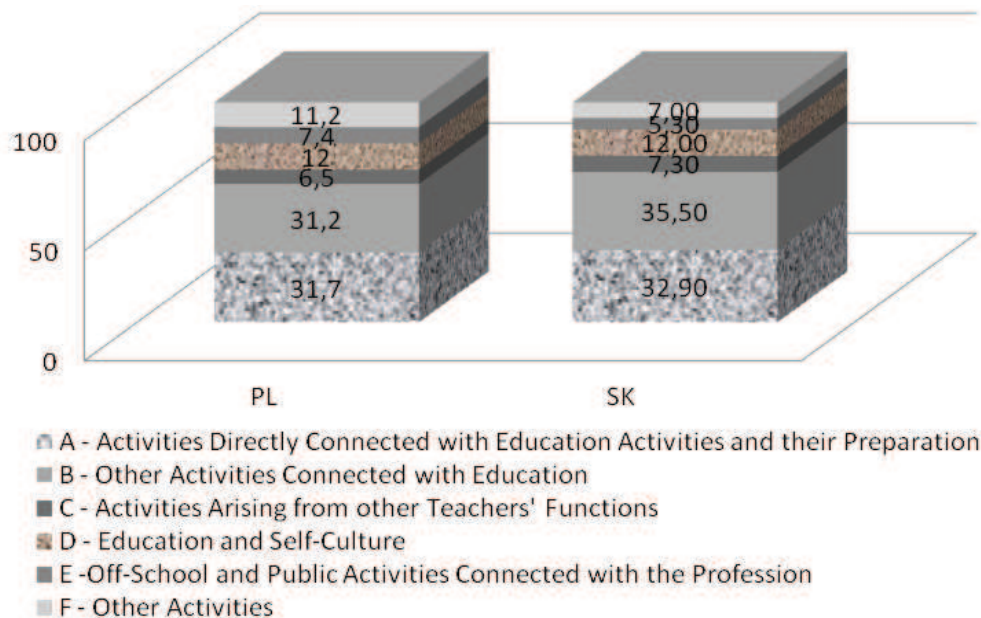
The teachers from Slovakia spend the most amount of time on performing and managing the education activities in the internal environment of the nursery school (a4), working in the methodological, consultative and other school bodies (a18), school hobby club management (a20) and the activities a23–a25, which are related with their education and self-education. The Slovak teachers spend the least time on programming and planning the education activities (a1), setting up and organizing the conditions for the education activities (a2), activities promoting the pupil's activation and motivation (a3), individual care for children with special educational needs (a9), activities connected with diagnosing the children (a11), completing pedagogical documentation (a13), consultation sessions and meetings in the nursery school (a15), library management (a19) and the teachers' study management (a22).

We further focused on comparing the teacher's performance in the respective countries according to the times stated under the particular activity categories.

The chart 2 interprets the percentage of the professional activities. Despite the different time load of the probands during the working week, it is obvious the proportional arrangement of the activities has its particular aspects. The teachers in Poland dedicate most of their time to the activities directly connected with education and its preparation. The pre-primary teachers from Slovakia spend most of their time on the other activities connected with education (activities a11–a17). The Polish teachers spend most of the time on performing the out-of-school (aE) and other activities. While the other aF activities are performed by the Polish respondents during the working week, they perform the out-of-school and public activities (aE) mostly after 4.00 PM. The highest time load required for the out-of-school and public activities is recorded in case of the Slovak respondents.



**Chart 2.** Comparison of The Respective Countries According to The Percentual Proportion of The Activities Included in The Professiography Sheet in Relation to The Particular Categories



Source: own processing.

Even though the time load of the pre-primary education teachers in the particular countries varies, the percentage proportion of the professional activities in relation to the respective activity categories is comparable between the countries.

## Conclusion

Based on our research we are able to present the image of real activities performed by teachers at the two levels of education (ISCED 0 and ISCED 1) and the results could support the social status of teachers as erudite experts with specific characteristics typical solely for this profession - thus following the definition of the term „expertness”<sup>14</sup> [26]. This project follows the objective to harmonize the theoretical approaches towards the profession in terms of the latest human resources management with the professional standards of the pre-school

<sup>14</sup> B. Kasáčová, B., Kosová, et. al., *Profesijný rozvoj učiteľa*, Prešov, 2006.

and primary school teachers in Slovakia. The outcome of the presented research objective shall be the exact empirical acquaintance with teachers' professional activities, their categorization, relation to professional standards and the system of teachers' professional development in the changing conditions of the present-day schools. Thus a modern and real professiography. Our findings should also serve as a humble contribution to the international discussions on the professionalization of the teacher profession and particularly of the pre-primary teachers playing the essential role in the development and education of children.

### Resources

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