



CASE STUDY INSETrom, SLOVAK REPUBLIC



FINAL Version

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Summary

Case study INSETrom is prepared within project Dialogue, which aims is bridging the gap between academic research on ULLL and the professional practice in teaching, learning and guidance in ULLL provision. The issue of lifelong learning at Universities in general, better and stronger linking practice and research is solved from four perspectives - in terms of Access and Progression, Quality, Learning & Guidance and New Media. The case study INSETrom was prepared with emphasis on access and progression. It describes the problem of the society as well as lifelong learning providers that they have to solve in working with the Roma community. It refers to the fact that good and well targeted lifelong learning activities can't be developed without a good quality research. INSETrom case study is an example, when researchers are also practitioners. It shows, however, that based on correct research is possible to identify new approaches to lifelong learning education for well-known and pre-existing target group. External organisation was not the partner over the research process or the proces of creating and realizing of concrete education activities. But however we could see the potential of universities to tackle of various scientific topics in lifelong learning. And using of this internal connection is one step towards transforming universities to lifelong learning universities.

Parts of this case study describe the background in which the problem was solved, research methodology and research process, link between research and practice as well as the transferability and recommendations of results of case study results into practice

This case study is a part of a national report focused on access and progression in lifelong learning at Slovak Universities and second case study identifying access to lifelong learning activities for partially sighted and blind people.

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Abstract

This case study describes the process of developing the continuing education programme for teacher of Roma students at the basic schools. It is very difficult to prepare specific training courses for adult Roma requiring a certain level of knowledge input, due to the fact that basic life skills and competencies lack the Roma parents. This level also depends on sub ethnic group in which they live because of different traditions and life-style inside groups. Parents are actually indirect target group while working with children and this approach is more effectively in the field of LLL. Therefore, it is effective to focus on education teachers working with Roma pupils and provide them with further training in intercultural and etnopedagogiky, allowing them to work effectively with this ethnic group.

INSETRom project's results shown, that continuing education of the teacher is one of the possible components that can reconcile two cultures and two views.

General background

Under the 2001 Population and Housing Census 82 000 citizens of Slovakia decelerated their Roma nationality in the National. But the number of Roma people is estimated for 320 000 and it is approximately 5,8 % (the statistic data from 2011 Census are still not available). In 1992 Roma people received status of national minority in Slovak republic. Roma are unevenly distributed, most of their lives in eastern Slovakia to 55%. They live in larger Roma settlements, some on Roma campsites and others in urban or suburban housing with little affiliation to a specific Roma community.

But they still have not their own independent national education system based on own culture background and study has been not realized in their own language. There are 2 sub ethnic groups of Roma – Rumungro Roma and Vlachike Roma in Slovak republic. The reader should know some information about education of Roma in Slovakia for better description and understanding of whole situation. 98% of Roma children do not attend kindergartens and 30 - 40% of them attend school only irregularly. They fail 14x more often and drop out the school before finishing the elementary school 30x more frequently than other children. 90% Roma did not proceed to higher than elementary education and only 2,5 % attends secondary school. School with high number of Roma pupils could use created tools for decreasing of handicaps in school system:

- *Zero grade* which helps children to reduce problems of lack of experience with majority school system, because they do not have any social and hygienic habits. Content of 1st school year is distributed for 2 years.
- *Teacher's assistant* whose helps the teacher and children in overcoming the language barrier. she/he also operates in families, checks the attendance, supervises over school duties etc.

All parents and students speak Romani and Slovakian (somewhere Hungarian, most in the southern part, where Hungarian are the largest community) but Roma living in the Eastern part of Slovakia tend to speak Romani more regularly, whereas in the Western part most speak Slovakian. Overall, the ability of Roma students to express themselves is below the ability level of the majority population. Explains the teacher's instructions in own language is one of tasks of the Teacher's assistant.

But the problems start inside the community – in Roma families. Not in all but in many. Roma children would not prepare for school at home and would not bring relevant school materials along, which indicates that they do not stick to school or classroom rules. Roma see school as an institution they "do not like" and take as "inevitable evil". Besides, parents would neglect hygiene and cleanliness and would not show any interest in their children. They are not convinced that education is of relevance for their children's future, nevertheless they expect their children to go to school, study well and finish school. Those parents that had a bad impression of their children's teachers or had negative memories about their own schooling were less prone to value education.

Teachers in schools with higher numbers of Roma have more experience with intercultural education and educating Roma students compared to teachers working in schools with lower concentrations of Roma pupils. Many teachers rely on empirical evidence and information from the media. Due to the fact that the image of Roma in the media is very negative, so naturally formed view are reflected in the development of attitudes towards this group. But for teachers and school officials in general knowing more about the background of the Roma families and communities is essential in order to better understand their life situation and perspectives. Only those knowledge and skills could help them better communicate with the parents and still more involved them into the process of education their children (and indirectly) their own education.

Sometimes special priority is given to these schools and they get extra support but often the resources provided for these schools are lacking and teacher training is not adequate, given the

diverse school populations and the students' particular needs. That is why it is necessary to regularly map requirements and needs for continuing education training of the teachers. The education has to include the historical and current relationship between members of the Roma communities and the majority populations, their current life circumstances and living situations

Objectives and Purpose

Aim of whole project was to facilitate school and Roma family partnerships in order to establish an environment of collaboration and shared goals for children's education. This will be achieved through teacher training in methods to engage Roma parents as active agents in their children's education.

The INSETRom project was developed against a background of barriers and unequal access to education, faced by Roma people, resulting in educational disadvantage. The project was based on the assumption that the development of adequate continuing education teacher training, the improvement of classroom practice and the enhancement of family-school relationships, foster educational inclusion and equity. Therefore, empirical research was conducted to gain insights into the views and experiences of teachers, Roma parents and Roma children themselves. This research phase was followed by the development of a core curriculum which included nine modules for teacher continuing education. The development of the curriculum was undertaken through a collaborative process of critical discussion.

All activities and whole process aimed at next objectives:

1. Help teachers become more aware of Roma culture, challenges and stereotypes and to redefine their role as educators that can facilitate Roma inclusion.
2. Assist teachers to develop their social and intercultural competencies in order to redefine their pedagogical tool for the intercultural school environment that will respect ethnic and cultural diversity.
3. Improve teachers' social and intercultural skills in order to communicate and work effectively with Roma parents.
4. Build functional and efficient interface for cooperation between Roma parents and school.
5. Motivate Roma parents to engage in school and become active contributors.

Links between Research and Practice

The results of realized empiric research and consultation with other experts were the basic for developing of the training curriculum for teachers working with Roma pupils. Without knowledge of the opinions, attitudes of teachers, parents and students could not be preparing an effective training program solving defined problem.

Researchers were interested to know whether there were any differences in the way the institutionalized education was perceived by the teachers, Roma pupils and their parents. They used the methodology of semi-structured interviews and focused on three groups of respondents (teachers of Roma pupils in primary and secondary schools; Roma pupils in primary and secondary schools; parents of Roma pupils). In order to conduct our research, they chose different groups of respondents, based on the character of research topic. Given the fact that researchers attempted to grasp the issue at stake in the most relevant way, their research file consisted of different school and regions.

Research Process (describe the method used to gather information /generate the new learning .)

The INSETRom project enabled researchers from the Slovak Republic to undertake an important research in the area of education of Roma pupils in the context of the analysis of their educational needs, while also attempting to define the needs of teachers involved in the process of education of Roma pupils, as well as the needs of parents of Roma pupils. The study that took place in Slovakia focused on analyzing the subjective perspectives of the teachers at primary schools and secondary

vocational schools, of Roma pupils and their parents on institutionalized education of Roma pupils. Research teams conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers of Roma students, with 11 Roma parents and with 12 Roma children at primary and secondary schools as well as at a special school. A sample consisted of teachers of primary and secondary schools (N=15), pupils (N=12, AM age 12,4, range 9-17 years old), parents (N=11 – mothers of Roma children, AM age 35,5).

The research took place with autochthonous Roma groups in towns and villages in two geographically differentiated regions in Eastern and Western Slovakia. There is a large community of Rumungro Roma in the Eastern part of Slovakia. Rumungro Roma are also in the higher developed Western part. In one school there were also Vlach Roma (Olas). The study took place in primary and secondary schools (and included an interview with a special education teacher) with high numbers of Roma students. The towns or villages are inhabited by many Roma, in the Eastern part of Slovakia, which is less developed and in the Western part, which is more developed. Interviews with Roma parents have been conducted in several stages. The representative of the Roma minority, well known for Roma people, took part in whole process. This fact allowed researchers to capture the spontaneity of respondents, so important for those people.

To some degree, ethnographic methods, such as participant observation, expert interviews, and collection of relevant materials were also used to elicit information. In particular, the collected data provided a basis for curriculum development for teacher training.

Duration of training in Slovak republic in hours: 24 hours (duration of modules and discussion)

Modules used in this training:

1. Culture and enculturation
2. Stereotypes and prejudice
3. Roma history
4. Multicultural societies- Multicultural and intercultural education
5. Teacher-Parent relations

Number of female participants: 12

Number of male participants: 3

Total participants: 15

Participation Roma teachers: 1

Background participants

Number of participants involved in school management: 1

Number of teachers who teach 5-10 year-olds: 3

Number of teachers who teach >10 year-olds: 10

Direct involvement of Roma

One Roma teacher was involved in giving the course.

No Roma parents involved in the course.

Together with the curriculum the researchers created for participants the system of evaluation:

1. Pre-training questionnaire
2. Post-training questionnaire for teachers after finishing the training.
3. Suggested questions for focus groups.

Pre-training questionnaire for teachers for monitoring basic questions regarding the work with pupils, learning of Roma pupils, mapping their experience with the work with both Roma pupils and their parents, identification of basic critical problems with teaching Roma pupils, knowledge of culture, habits and nature of Roma Pupils.

Post-training questionnaire focused on the evaluation of the training and each modul, descriptions of the participants' expectations, what they considered positive and negative, their recommendations. The focused group was used for searching for the effectivity of realised training modules. Under the collected data teachers for increasing their skills to better teach and involved the parent in whole process need:

- to take place at intercultural trainings, courses on stress management,
- to integrate Roma history, culture and language into the curriculum,
- to have more assistants at school,
- to have support in communicating with Roma families.

The authors of the report also suggest to have teacher trainings on dealing with a multicultural environment and on challenging stereotypes of both, teachers and peers.

The last step was to create a longitudinal study to assess the outcomes of this training and to monitor the level of change. For the purpose of this evaluation, two questions were chosen for projections of future outcomes and impacts:

1. A question requiring teachers to identify the barriers for implementation of the new insights they gained through the training,
2. A question inquiring about the teachers' plans to deal with these barriers.

The teachers' answers to these two questions also demonstrated what they acquired from the training and how equipped they felt they were to return back to their communities and to their day-to-day school life.

When asked on the Pre-training Questionnaire about their assessment of the greatest challenges that they felt they would face when teaching Roma children, the teachers gave the following answers (in the order of frequency with which they were mentioned):

1. Attendance
2. Attitude
3. Attention span
4. Preparation for school
5. Socialization and overcoming of stereotypes
6. Integration of Roma pupils in society

The Post-training questionnaire asked the teachers to list the barriers for implementation of the insights that they gained from the training modules, and to propose methods that they plan to use to deal with the barriers.

Barriers	Plans for overcoming the barriers
Low school attendance of Roma children causing them to fall behind academically	Will continue in the same manner to resolve the problems
Attitude that Roma parents have towards school and Roma pupils' lack of care for school materials	Partner with Roma parents, demonstrate patience and cooperation with Roma families; visit parents in their homes; organize the school environment so that children can leave their school materials at school
Roma children's learning difficulties	Be friendly, encouraging, approachable
Lack of cooperation from other teachers and from other pupils	Build team cooperation with all teaching staff
Lack of parental involvement	Partner with Roma parents, visit Roma homes
Roma culture	Stay positive when facing potential issues
Busy teachers' schedules and constraints of curriculum and standard tests.	Use the holidays; extracurricular activities; new, more flexible curriculum would help

The table above represents the researchers' effort to match, to the best extent possible, the mentioned solutions with the concrete barriers.

In discussing the barriers for implementation of teachers' new, post-training insights, they expressed the same factors that they listed in the Pre-training questionnaire as their challenges when teaching Roma pupils. Under this research and gathering data from participants of the training there was identified one new barrier: "Roma culture", that was added to the list in the Post-training questionnaire. Listing it as a barrier after the training suggests that as much as the training on Roma culture, language and history was seen as the most valuable by teachers, it was not always able to avoid a danger of adding "scientific validation" to existing stereotypes, instead of leading to realizations that would affect cognitive and behavioural change in teacher perceptions and methods.

Linking Researchers and Practitioners

Research has been prepared, implemented and evaluated by specialists whose have been authors of the curriculum of training and the lecturers at the next stage of implementing of the project. Therefore, it is possible to say that the researchers were also practitioners. The linking between two groups is so intensive.

Transferability of the Case

This case study describes the continuing education of teachers of marginalized groups, in which involving into the LLL activities is really problematic. Roma adults have negative attitude to formal education (not all but most so). This study, however, gives us an example how to use the potential and impact of teachers on the whole group and thus by the creating of the skills indirectly create new target group for continuing education in term of several years. This procedure is applicable also for other marginalized groups vulnerable social inclusion. On the other side the study is describing the access of specific target group without or with lack of LLL activities - teachers of marginalized groups.

Recommendations from the Case Study

It is necessary to consider the extent to which education will be implemented effectively and bring expected results for some planned target groups. Education of other target groups narrow cooperated with the intended target groups could be more beneficial for all parties. All educational activities in formal and non-formal education system as well as the outcomes of the surveys clearly confirm the needs for knowledge of the culture of the minority, model of its behaviours and its historical background. School can and should do something to take into account "Roma culture". Culture is important but the perspective teachers have on culture is crucial. Teachers need general historical and cultural background information. But delivering anthropological and historical content does not necessarily generate changes in attitudes and in teaching practice. Balance is needed between background knowledge and skills to adapt to the specific situation awareness of psychological mechanisms which can block or enhance learning and positive social relations. This approach could be applicable not only for teachers of Roma students but in general for other minorities in Europe, too.

Further Reading

<http://www.iaie.org/insetrom/index.html>