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CURRICULUM DOCUMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF MINORITY LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Abstract: The present paper explores the similarities and differences in curriculum documentation between the Slovak Republic and Ontario province (Canada) in the context of language teaching and minority ethnic groups, focusing on how these minority ethnic groups are represented. The aim of this study is to identify areas for enhancement in the realm of language education for the Roma minority within the context of the Slovak educational system.

Keywords: language education, language minorities, curriculum, Slovakia, Ontario, Roma minority

DOKUMENT PROGRAMOWY W KONTEKŚCIE EDUKACJI JĘZYKA MNIEJSZOŚCI

Streszczenie (abstrakt): Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu zbadanie podobieństw i różnic w dokumentacji programowej między Republiką Słowacką a prowincją Ontario (Kanada) w kontekście nauczania języków i mniejszości etnicznych, koncentrując się na tym, jak reprezentowane są te mniejszości etniczne. Celem tego badania jest zidentyfikowanie obszarów wymagających poprawy w zakresie edukacji językowej mniejszości romskiej w kontekście słowackiego systemu edukacji.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja językowa, język mniejszości, dokument programowy, Słowacja, Ontario, mniejszość romska

1. Introduction

The Slovak Republic has been characterized by a rich ethnic composition since its inception. Due to the global trend of increasing population migration, the spectrum of ethnic diversity is expanding. The latest Census of Population, Households, and Dwellings of the Slovak Republic indicated the presence of at least 29 different nationalities and at least 26 language groups (Štatistický úrad SR, 2024).

Even though the right to education in the mother tongue has long been enshrined in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, practice and its results point to a different reality. The school, as a state institution, is thus a reflection of society, and it represents the "official" language and culture of the majority population. In the Slovak educational reality, this is the Slovak language, which in the school year 2024/2025 represents the language of instruction for 89.7% of pupils in the Slovak Republic (CVTI SR, 2024). The

opportunity to be educated in their mother tongue is provided to children of Hungarian, German, Ukrainian, and Rusyn nationalities.

For a long time, the second largest ethnic and linguistic group of the population – the Roma – has been neglected. Their mother tongue is Romani, which is the preferred language in almost 50% of Roma communities, while Slovak is used at home by only 35% of them (Ravász et al., 2020). The difference between the mother tongue and the school environment, which does not adequately consider the diversity of linguistic and cultural backgrounds of pupils, is one of the factors responsible for the academic failure of Roma children. Already in the initial phases of education, they encounter difficulties and end their schooling before completing all grades of primary school. The result of the synergy of these facts is generations of Roma trapped in a cycle of poverty. The low level of education and the resulting limited opportunities to find employment lead to the deepening of marginalization and social exclusion.

The Finnish linguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) addresses the concept of linguistic racism within educational contexts and notably highlights the utilization of what she terms a "submersion language programme." This approach compels children from linguistic minorities to adopt the dominant language of the school without the provision of adequate support, thereby ascribing any academic challenges they encounter to individual deficits rather than to systemic inadequacies. A similarity may be observed between the education of Roma children in Slovakia and the education of language minorities in Canada. In prior years, Canada also addressed instances of linguistic racism directed toward its indigenous population. Education in the indigenous languages of the province of Ontario encountered multiple cultural and social challenges resulting from colonization. During this epoch, students from indigenous language minority communities were educated in boarding schools, where the utilization of their mother tongue was penalized, and students were compelled to suppress their cultural identity and assimilate into the majority culture (Government of Canada, 2025). However, in 1996, a change in approach was enacted, and based on the Canadian National Report on Aboriginal Peoples, a process of restoring indigenous languages was initiated. Subsequently, in 2019, the Indigenous Languages Act in Canada was passed, thereby strengthening language education in schools and language programs (Justice Law Website, 2025). The matter of the teaching language is a paramount parameter in the academic success of pupils from minority backgrounds.

Curriculum documentation serves as a foundational element in shaping educational practices and outcomes, particularly in the context of language teaching and the representation of minority ethnic groups (Feng & Sunuodula, 2009). A comparative analysis of curriculum documentation between different educational systems can reveal disparities and potential areas for improvement in addressing the needs of diverse student populations (Michener et al., 2013). This paper undertakes such an endeavour by examining the curriculum documentation of the Slovak Republic and the province of Ontario in Canada in the context of language teaching and minority ethnic groups, focusing on how these minority ethnic groups are represented.

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2. Data and Methodology

The subjects of analysis were the curricular documents of Language Education of Minorities in the Canadian province of Ontario (Grades 1 to 3) and the State Educational Program for Basic Education – the educational area Language and Communication, sub-area teaching the first language – Languages of National Minorities – Romani Language and Literature (Cycle 1). Significant similarities and differences between the curricular documents of Ontario and Slovakia will be identified. Consequently, the subsequent research question was stated:

- RQ1: *What similarities and differences exist between the curriculum documents of Ontario and Slovakia?*

We employed coding: a manual, "pen and paper" approach utilizing an inductive method, proceeding from textual data to codes, and subsequently from codes to theoretical frameworks. The codes generated during the analysis represent the researcher's interpretation of the text. To enhance objectivity, the coding process was independently executed by two researchers. The resultant semantic categories are derived from a comparison of their subjective perceptions and mutual negotiation. These categories were graphically presented, described, and interpreted accordingly.

Based on the content analysis conducted, Table 1 was developed to delineate three principal semantic categories. These categories encompass meanings denoted by specific codes, which are posited as indicators for facilitating a comparative analysis of the selected curricular documents. The codes highlighted in bold signify the most salient disparities observed between these documents; consequently, dedicated attention will be afforded to these codes, with a detailed exposition of their potential applications and limitations within the context of the Slovak Republic.

Table 1. Results of the analysis

Meaning Categories	Code	Slovak Republic	Ontario
Significance of Language Education	ROLE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION	Creating the foundations of reading and writing literacy	General overview of the nature and function of language, which will serve as a basis for the development of the mother tongue
	GOAL OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION	Arouse interest in Roma literature and culture through the Roma language	Arouse pride in the language of their ancestors and motivate them to use it every day
Cooperation in language education	INTERDISCIPLINARY RELATIONS	Not mentioned	Integrated language program

	EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS	Primary student and teacher	Cooperation between students, family, teacher, school management, and the community
Activities in language education	COMPONENTS OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION	Communication interaction Spoken production Written production Factual reception Experiential reception	Communication Listening and reading comprehension Organisation of ideas Application of language knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, language rules) Knowledge and understanding of culture
	METHODS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION	Dialogical communication and cooperation Staging methods	Experiential learning Communication with „native speakers" Cooperation with the community
	TIME ALLOCATION	Teaching one lesson lasting 45 minutes every two weeks	Teaching every day in a time range of 20 minutes

Significance of Language Education

In the semantic category of Significance of Language Education, apparent meanings were identified and grouped under two codes: the role of language education and the goal of language education.

The code, *role of language education*, reveals the focus of this education in the selected curricular documents. In both cases, the role was similar, with education primarily focused on developing language knowledge and skills. The difference lies in the focus on the mother tongue, which was not mentioned in the State Educational Program of the Slovak Republic, where the role was defined as creating the foundations of reading and writing literacy. In the Ontario province document, the role of education is to create a general overview of the nature and function of language, which will serve as a foundation for language knowledge and skills in the mother tongue, enabling students to communicate in it.

The goal of language education is fulfilled by creating a positive attitude in students towards their mother tongue. The State Educational Program of the Slovak Republic

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focuses on developing an interest in Roma literature and culture, which are fostered through the Roma language. In comparison to the curricular document of the province of Ontario, the aspect of instilling and developing pride in the language of one's ancestors and motivation for its use in everyday life is missing. This significant difference adequately reflects the status of specific linguistic minorities in society. Canada, of which Ontario is a part, has long focused on a positive and inclusive approach to minorities and otherness in general. It fully supports multiculturalism and strives to ensure equal access to opportunities and rights for every resident, regardless of race, nationality, or ethnic origin (Justice Law Website, 2025). Support for refugees, minorities, and the effort to create a tolerant society are ingrained in the attitudes of its members and reflected in practice, as confirmed by Brosseau et al. (2009). The transfer of these attitudes into minority education is thus based on the culture of society. The Slovak Republic has long struggled with the acceptance of the Roma minority, as evidenced by the growing hostile political and public discourse. This is also confirmed by a survey from the Institute of Social Communication Research of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 2019 (Lašticová & Poslon, 2020), which found that up to two-thirds of respondents identified with openly negative stereotypes about Roma. This survey also revealed that only half of the respondents partially agreed with statements that highlight the value of Roma culture. Roma in the Slovak Republic are a minority without a voice or power. The school system requires them to adapt to the language and culture of the school, which is very challenging for children from segregated Roma settlements. Education takes place mainly in the Slovak language, and although there are efforts to create language education in the Roma language, it is an isolated model with little time allocation, serving more as a supplement than the main content of education for children without knowledge of the language of instruction. In this way, the school forces Roma students not to use their mother tongue, leading to its gradual disappearance. For the Roma language to become a living language and be part of a living culture, it is necessary for both the school and society to be interested in improving the conditions of education for these children.

Cooperation in Language Education

The semantic category of Cooperation in Language Education comprises two codes: interdisciplinary relations and education participants.

The code *interdisciplinary relations* expresses the degree of integration of language education into the teaching of non-language subjects. The State Educational Program of the Slovak Republic does not focus on this aspect, and language education in the Roma language is understood as a separate lesson without linking to other subjects. Students develop their mother tongue in the school environment only at a specific time and on selected topics that are limited by the State Educational Program. Specifically, these are the topics: "Me and my family, home and housing, my community – native country, life in the city and in the village, life in the Roma community, family and society, basic kinship relations, family customs, holidays and celebrations, free time and hobbies, in school/in class, friendship and helping others, stories and legends about good and evil, the human

body, my family and art, health care, the importance of nature for humans/humans as part of nature, humans and nature, nature and animals, Roma customs and traditions, Roma crafts and professions, travel and transport, Roma food and clothing, time, seasons and weather" (ŠVP, 2024, s.79). The mentioned topics are also developed in separate subjects, but without the implementation of the Roma language. Therefore, the curricular document of the province of Ontario, which focuses on the interdisciplinary development of the mother tongue of minorities, could be an inspiration. In this way, it would also be possible to implement language education for the Roma minority in the Slovak education system.

The code *education participants* represents a view of the individual actors in education. The curricular document of the province of Ontario provides a detailed view of the roles of individual actors in language education. It is not limited only to the teacher and student, or the school management, but focuses on a broad community composed of the family and members of the linguistic minority available at the school. According to the creators of this curricular document, quality and beneficial language teaching is not possible without cooperation between the family, community, and school. The importance of this cooperation extends beyond language teaching. Family members and members of the linguistic minority are directly involved in the educational process and become "native speakers" who familiarize students with the history, culture, and language in everyday life, not only in the school environment. Their participation in education improves students' educational results and their educational aspirations for the future (Guedes et al, 2024). If the school cooperates with parents only in cases where it is necessary to solve a problem, parents will not be interested in the school (Ďuričeková, 2000). In the case of Roma students' parents, the school must find a way to reach out and help overcome the barrier of distrust towards the majority society (Rosinský, 2006). Limited knowledge of the school's language – standard Slovak – affects communication between parents and teachers. Lareau (in Dumais, 2006) states that parents from lower social classes often feel insufficiently competent to communicate with teachers. Communicating with them is unpleasant, and they believe that the school is separate from home. Education, in their understanding, is the responsibility of teachers, and so they avoid contact with the school. Strengthening this relationship would be beneficial not only for the students themselves but also for the teachers who teach the Roma language. Getting to know Roma culture and life, even in excluded communities, would help reduce the gap that has formed between the majority of society and the Roma. It would also help teachers better understand the needs of Roma students and approach their education more sensitively.

Activities in Language Education

The semantic category of Activities in Language Education comprises three codes: components of language education, methods of language education, and time allocation.

The *components of language education* code represents the skills and abilities that a student should acquire through language education. In Ontario, in grades 1-3, the focus is on listening comprehension (especially in grade 1), followed by reading comprehension, organization of thoughts, application of language knowledge, and knowledge and

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understanding of culture. In the Slovak Republic, the requirements for students involved in language education are similar, focusing on spoken, written, factual, and experiential reception, which is developed mainly through reading and dramatization of texts. A notable difference is the focus on knowledge and understanding of culture, which stems from the reasons mentioned in the code Goal of Language Education. Social and political discourse is significantly reflected in the educational system. In the Slovak Republic, we can observe this in the approach to quality education for the most vulnerable groups of citizens, which includes students from marginalized Roma communities. The transformation of the school system is related to the culture of society, its value orientation, attitudes, and lifestyle. It will likely take many years for the majority society to stop viewing Roma education as a problem. The way to improvement is to recognize their uniqueness and support the language they bring to school, building a positive attitude towards their own culture.

The *methods of language education* code represents approaches to language learning. The Ontario curriculum document focuses on language development in live communication and culture, supporting experiential learning that takes place not only in the school environment but especially in interaction with the language community. Students participate in activities such as cultural events and holiday celebrations, acquiring not only culture but also language in real-life situations. Cooperation with the community and involving members in teaching as "native speakers" is beneficial for all parties. Language education in the Roma language is mainly based on methods of dialogical communication, cooperation and enactment methods, which create an "artificial" environment for language teaching. In the home environment, they acquired the language in natural communication situations that they experienced or were part of. In preschool age, they acquired Romani, the local dialect of Slovak, and other languages spoken in their primary environment. The school approaches language teaching diametrically differently, with a basis in targeted language education through learning individual concepts and grammatical rules, which contradicts natural and unmanaged acquisition (Hajská, 2015).

The *time allocation* code indicates the amount of time devoted to minority language education on a daily or weekly basis. In Ontario, approximately 20 minutes a day are devoted to this education during the first three grades. The time allocation in the Slovak Republic is significantly lower, with a recommendation from the State Educational Program to devote 45 minutes to language teaching every two weeks.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined similarities and differences between curriculum documents for minority language education in Ontario and Slovakia, revealing significant disparities in approaches, goals, and implementation. In Ontario, the curriculum emphasizes community involvement and experiential learning, while Slovakia takes a more traditional approach, particularly in the education of Roma children.

A notable difference arises in how language education goals and pedagogical activities are conceptualized and implemented. While Ontario's curriculum emphasizes

community engagement and experiential learning in authentic, real-world settings, Slovak policies may inadvertently reinforce negative stereotypes about Roma populations, hindering genuine inclusion (Miškolci et al., 2017). T. Gažovičová (2015) also highlights the importance of enhancing Slovak language acquisition among Roma students. Unlike Ontario's focus on language development through communicative interaction and cultural immersion, Roma language education in Slovakia often uses decontextualized methods that differ significantly from natural language acquisition in domestic settings, creating a 'double language barrier' (Bánovčanová et al., 2020). Drawing parallels with Canada's efforts to revitalize Indigenous languages and informed by J. Cummins' (2014) assertion about the importance of evidence-based policies, Slovakia could foster a more inclusive educational environment. This could involve recognizing and valuing the Romani language and culture, promoting positive attitudes, and thoroughly revising curriculum and pedagogy to better meet the specific needs of Roma students (Miskovic & Curcic, 2016).

Limitations of this study include its focus solely on curricular documents, which may not fully reflect the realities of classroom practice. Future research should explore the impact of different language education models on Roma students' academic achievement and well-being and investigate the experiences of Roma students and teachers in Slovak schools.

In conclusion, this analysis reveals significant differences in minority language education between Ontario and Slovakia, particularly in the approach to Roma education. By adopting a more community-based, culturally responsive, and linguistically inclusive approach, Slovakia can better support the educational needs of Roma children and promote their full participation in society.

Acknowledgement

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