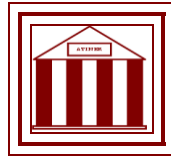


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**Integration and Segregation in the
Education of Roma Minority**

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Integration and Segregation in the Education of Roma Minority

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Abstract

The paper offers an overview of the current state of integration of Roma ethnic minority in the education system in Slovakia, as it is present in domestic literature. Roma minority represent a large scale of the Slovak population. Significant part of Roma population is facing low social and economic status strongly associated with their low education level. We focus on education policy towards Roma, whose development has been strongly framed by promoting integration policies. We mention persisting segregation in education of Roma and consider the possibilities and difficulties of application of the model of integration and inclusion in the education of Roma in Slovakia.

Keywords: Education policy, Roma education, integration, segregation, inclusion

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Introduction

The current education policy in Slovakia towards ethnic minorities is based on general principles of mutual coexistence framed by equal status of ethnic minorities and guaranteed by national and transnational legal regulations (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Slovak Republic Constitution, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* etc.). Roma ethnic group in Slovakia is nevertheless facing historical experience with low education level mainly due to generally lower level of readiness to meet the requirements of mainstream education. Roma pupils are not educated in separate ethnic schools, like for example Hungarian pupils are (main reasons are – using Roma language uncertainties in education, lack of Roma teachers, lack of school books in Roma language), but the social processes, mentioned later, lead to creation of ethnically homogeneous Roma schools.

The Brief View to History of Integration Policies

An overall approach to Roma ethnic group after 1989 (which meant significant changes in the whole society) can be covered by term of *integration policy*. Integration represents the highest level of different social groups coexistence in the society. Integration is not only about „inclusion the one into the group, but also about the one’s acceptance by group members...”¹ Social situation and status of Roma ethnic group has been constantly characterized with a number of problems in all areas of their personal, civic and public life. Seriousness and depth of the problems accumulated, has even deepened after social changes in 1989. Even Roma people present heterogeneous social group, many of them are having a kind of social handicaps² or a combination of its species (low level of education, lack of working skills and experiences, origin etc.). An effort to solve those problems, this time from the perspective of integration not assimilation, led gradually to creation and execution of complex systems and subsystems of integrative policies, which are necessarily linked to each other.

The process of segregation is complex and doesn’t occur only in education. Improving the situation of segregation of Roma in education is linked to other fields – employment and labour market, housing, health, social policy, political participation and others³. But the education system should be the one which highlights the problem. In my opinion, the education system should be the first to shout, and required to prevent and solve the signs of segregation.

¹ Jandourek (2001, p. 109)

² Brutovská (2011)

³ Rafael and Kahátová (2011)

Significant changes in philosophy of education, in comparison to socialistic model of assimilation, occurred after ratification of the document *The Principles of Government Policy towards Roma in Slovak Republic* in 1991. The cultural and educational development of Roma population should be provided as with other minorities in Slovakia according to *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. An emphasis in this document was put on the quality of educational process. The quality should be reached through the development of communication and language, working-out of differential educational program of elementary school which would respect the particularities of Roma pupils in all didactic components.

Several strategic documents and conceptions related to Roma ethnic group has been created throughout the nineties till present. They have been elaborated in the form of decrees, guidelines and methodology in the education field.

In relation to education of Roma in the school system we conclude:

- Due to the percentage of the Roma population on the overall population, there is a significant lack of schools officially focused on the education of Roma children and youth. In some schools Roma pupils prevails because of territorial marginalization enhanced by non-Roma residents exodus (there are villages where Roma people represent majority). This process is confirmed by research of various authors¹.
- The proportion of Roma in various levels of education is uneven². Despite of many other reasons (drop out and push out factors), Roma remain closed in the elementary level of education. The school system seems not to be opened enough to allow Roma pupils to secondary education.
- The high proportion of Roma children in special schools for pupils with mental disabilities is persisting. Their proportion in special schools is uneven compared to their proportion to overall school children population;
- Roma children are much less successful in education. According to a number of studies³, their school performance is generally worse and they perceived themselves as worse pupils.
- The educational career of Roma is significantly shorter with frequently lower quality of educational outputs.

The process of searching for suitable school education model is ongoing.

The experts from academic sphere and educational practice are still searching for answers to unresolved issues such as:

¹ For example Huttová et al. (2012), Hojsík (2011)

² Matulay (2003), Salner (2004)

³ For instance Horňák (2009), Lukáč (2010), Petrasová and Porubský (2013)

- integrated or separated education of Roma (both models have the pros and cons),
- using the Roma language in the education (possible positive outcomes in terms of pedagogic efficiency mixed up with higher risk of the social exclusion deepening),
- an application of measures to ensure equal opportunities in the education – what is often perceived as benefit focused on Roma children only in public opinion (such misunderstanding in public opinion is present in other fields as well),
- the curriculum transformation according to meeting the specific needs of Roma children and youth (cultural, economic, social) – the question if we do really need special curriculum for Roma pupils remains unanswered due to inclusion and integration mixing-up.

Since 2001 the *Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic* has been declaring the interest to deal with the problems of Roma education by tighter cooperation with experts on different level of education system. Their cooperation results in even more strategic documents defining legislative and institutional conditions of education of Roma. Since the approval of *Conception of Roma children and pupils education* (2001) the various elements of Roma education system has been put into practice: zero year (for children not reaching the requirements needed for first year at elementary school), teaching assistants (should be of Roma origin), curricula with Roma language, Roma language textbook introduction etc. Yet the final document with central scope is *Strategy of Slovak Republic for integration of Roma till 2020* (2011). The education of Roma is based on *National action plan of Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015*. The highest attention is focused to pre-school education of Roma children, the diagnosis of school readiness, reliability of testing the eligibility to include children in special education, the introduction of desegregation measures in education, training pedagogical staff, educational programs etc. An effort to quit the segregation practice in the Slovak education system is highlighted in this document: „...*To improve an access to quality education together with education and care in early childhood, as well as elementary, secondary and higher education with particular emphasis to eliminate the segregation in schools prevent early school leaving and ensuring successful transitions from school to work*“¹.

Integration and Segregation – What Is What and Why?

Although we have seen a significant increase of interest in solving problems in the education of Roma in the last decade, the results (in terms of higher education level of Roma population, higher rate of employment) do not

¹ *Strategy of Slovak Republic for integration of Roma till 2020* (2011, p. 29)

meet the amount of human and economic capital invested in this area. We have to take into account that educational system is producing the social inequalities on its own. This argument is well elaborated in the theories of reproduction of education and is generally accepted in the science of education and society. The education depends not only from cultural background of the individual¹. It is also fact that education alone produces and strengthens cultural differences and is one of the important sources of social stratification. Social status of an individual plays a significant role in relation to the possibilities and opportunities for social mobility². The cultural differences in socialization content should not be a problem on its own in multicultural society, but the current system of education is not able to cope with distinctive cultural differences adequately. We must consider not only cultural but literally civilization gap when talking about education of Roma coming from segregated environment. The process of legitimization and deepening cultural and social differences is the reaction in the education. The child's identity is build up in education by teacher who is applying different approaches according to his expectations of child's performance³. The school plays an important role in the children's socialization and contributes to social identity validation.

Similar conclusions from practice are recorded in the surveys⁴ (mainly conducted by non-governmental organizations). The brief view of the concept of cultural integration is needed. The **concept of cultural integration** represents „the process of mutual interaction and merging the elements of major and minor culture in order to create new cultural entity, which would include the footprints of both of its elements“⁵. *Integrated education* is thus seen as a goal, not as one of the possible ways of Roma education.

Segregated education is the opposite of integrated education and means the physical separation of groups in education (whether classes or whole schools). Segregation in education can be interpreted variously, depending on the criteria of segregation (social, cultural, educational and so on). Segregated education is present for long time as a tool for education of children with physical or mental disabilities. In Slovakia segregation of Roma pupils obtains different meaning due to historical and actual social and ethnic processes. There are two more terms used in literature and practice. *Desegregation* is the term which is close to integration or inclusion. These terms are often confused. The measures of desegregation are focused on immediate elimination of segregating elements. Desegregation always represents the process of completion of separation of two groups, mainly based on the race⁶. *Inclusion*, on the other hand, is the society-wide approach aimed on creating and

¹ Průcha (1999)

² Matějů et al. (2006)

³ Willis (1977)

⁴ For instance Friedman et al. (2009), Huttová et al. (2012), Rafael (2011), Gallová Kriglerová (2012)

⁵ Bezáková, Lajčáková (2002, p. 816)

⁶ Huttová et al. (2012)

enforcing equal opportunities. In the education, an inclusion is based on the right of pupils to attain the same quality of education, which is enriching and meets their educational needs. In the educational process is inclusion aimed on preventing the risk of exclusion of any child within the school environment.

The segregation in education system in Slovakia is present in these forms:

- segregated education in the system of special education (in the special classes in the mainstream schools and in the special school classes),
- segregated education in the mainstream school system (schools with significant prevalence of Roma pupils, mainstream schools with Roma pupils only and separated Roma classes in mainstream schools)¹.

The most important is to ensure and even increase the quality of education in segregated education. Segregated education can occur unintentionally due to the gradual withdrawal of the local non-Roma population. The formation of ethnically homogeneous Roma schools is connected to expansion of residential segregation. For instance, in Banská Bystrica district nine separated classes only for Roma pupils were set up due to high number of Roma pupils (*Report on the status of implementation of the conditions of inclusive education for children from socially disadvantaged families in the primary schools in the school year 2012/2013 in SR*). It has happened in two schools, where teaching was carried out also in mixed classes. The parents of separately taught children did not complain about separation. Roma parents often see separated education as the way to protect children from race and school performance differences, as they have their own experience with teacher's selective approach in mixed classes. On the other hands, there are voices from Roma parents requesting to join education with non-Roma pupils, as it appeared in some researches². They perceive non-Roma pupils as patterns for their children mainly in terms of communication in Slovak language and building good interactions with non-Roma environment useful in their future life. That means that every case of segregation should be reviewed individually. But the process of ethnic homogenization is discouraging, because it reflects worsening relations between majority and Roma community. Segregated education is emerging also as reaction of majority to increasing rate of Roma children in classes. Non-Roma parents then often change their children's school and chose the school with lower number of Roma pupils, even if they have to travel more kilometres each day. Segregation process is thus accelerated. The right of parents to choose the school for their children is at that point contra productive. The link between territorial segregation and segregation in schools is also pointed by other authors³ and their research.

¹ Hapalová and Drál (2011, p. 62)

² Petrasová and Porubský (2013), Lukáč (2010)

³ Hojsík (2011), Huttová et al. (2012)

Segregated education presents serious problem which needs to be resolved. It occurs as a result of:

- enrolment of Roma children in special schools is at a significantly higher level than non-Roma children (with almost no chance to get back into the mainstream school or class)
- majority is moving out of the area due to the increasing proportion of the Roma population – schools are becoming more homogenous with prevalence of Roma children,
- in order to ensure that non-Roma parents would keep their children in the school, the school is separating Roma and non-Roma children in education.

Increasing tendency of segregated education of Roma children shows the fact, that in 1990 „only“ 11 % of Roma children and youth from segregated environment were educated separately, while in 2010 the proportion raised up to 55 % of children¹. Serious consequences resulting from segregated education related to school and pupils are:

- overall worse measurable outcomes of the school,
- worsening of the school attendance,
- undesirable changes in teaching staff (increasing teachers tendency to leave school, low interest of new teachers to teach in such a school),
- teacher's demands on pupil's performance are reduced,
- increasing of seriousness and frequency of pupil's misbehaviour,
- worsening of overall atmosphere in the school.

The survey taken by Roma education fund showed that schools do not play active role when it comes to the issue of the disproportionate enrolment of Romani children in special schools. Schools do not monitor or take care of children transferring between special and standard schools².

In recent years, significant funds are invested to renovation of existing schools and new schools are being built as well – directly in, or close to Roma settlements (thanks to EU structural funds). Increasing availability of education is precondition to integration, but overall it can lead to even deeper segregation. More Roma ethnically homogenous elementary schools and more Roma kindergartens can close even more almost closed door between Roma and non-Roma. An isolation of Roma pupils in Roma schools is definitely not according to the idea of inclusion. In such environment it is almost impossible to fulfil inclusive idea based on mutual acceptance, support and differences toleration as there will be no differences.

¹ Filadelfiová et al. (2012)

² Gallová Kriglerová, Gažovičová and Kosová (2012)

In promoting inclusion compared to the integration, we do not talk about two or more different groups (as it is present in the debate about integration of Roma to society or education). There is only one group of pupils with diverse needs¹. The terms inclusion and integration are freely confused even in official documents of state's institutions in the education policy. Inclusion is perceived as common education or as the integration to mainstream classes and so on. The main objective of *inclusive pedagogy* is to reach respect for the uniqueness not transforming uniqueness to unity². However, in Slovak education reality, the inclusive education is restricted to application of selected integration measures to practice. Such politics cannot meet necessary changes in philosophy of Roma education, as they can hardly contribute to inclusive school constitution. Inclusive philosophy of education can be implemented in segregated education as well. The current inclusive politics consists of measures such as *education in whole-day education system* – which is primarily focused on reducing the negative influence of natural Roma environment (community and family) on children, or education of the Roma children in separate classes or whole schools. These measures are in stark contrast with the idea of inclusion in education.

Conclusion

There are of course relevant reasons to educate children with special needs separately (mental disability, sensory disabilities). Separated education of Roma children who are able to be educated in mainstream school, according to the level of their intellect, leads to deepening the social distance between Roma and Non-Roma. The Slovak education system has high level of segregation, because of high amount of special schools incomparable with the rest of Europe³. Yes, we can count on higher incidence of mental disability among Roma segregated population; nevertheless the special schools system is enormously developed.

The processes of segregation in Slovak education system have significant influence on Roma pupil's school performance and their relation to school and education. If the school attendance is perceived only as uncomfortable obligation, we cannot expect that children will be motivated to reach better school results. We also note the link between school performance, relation to education in childhood and its consequences in adulthood. Especially Roma parents are important target groups in the adult education, as they represent education patterns for their children. They should play an active role in school activities aimed on inclusion. We need to start with parents if we want to be able to integrate their children⁴. The school experience has often unsuspected

¹ Leonhardt et al. (2007)

² Zelina (2012)

³ Klein and Matulayová (2007)

⁴ Pirohová (2014)

consequences not only in terms of social exclusion (employability, poverty, undesirable behaviour etc.), but in the lack of important personality characteristics such as responsibility, reliability, communication skills, credibility etc.

We can only agree¹ that existing measures are focused only on the process of adapting Roma children to Non-Roma children. The main emphasis should be put on maximizing the school outcomes of every single pupil regardless to his/her ethnicity what needs to be done by serious changes – not only in education system. Beside of that approach, schools should not be left in inclusive activities alone – the local institutions must be involved, in order to ensure that inclusive activities will not begin and end within the school.

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¹ Together with Gallová Kriglerová and Gažovičová (2012)

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