

Comparative Analysis of Slovak and Serbian Teacher Mentors' Views on Expectations and Challenges in Working with Mentees

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Abstract

One of the most significant factors affecting the efficiency of the educational system is the training of teachers for the teaching profession. This training is conducted by mentors, who are more experienced teachers. However, a characteristic feature of European countries is that training for mentors does not exist or is present in minimal numbers. So, the training of the mentees depends on the mentors' understanding of this process, their expectations from the mentees, and perceived challenges in their work with the mentees. The aim of the research presented in the paper was to look at potential differences in teacher mentors' views on expectations and challenges in working with mentees in Slovakia and Serbia. The main results showed consistency and congruence of problems in the field of mentoring in both the examined European countries. The most common and significant problems were related to didactics and work methodology, preparations and documentation, and class organisation and time articulation of the class. Serbian mentors highlighted the personal commitment of mentees as the most important expectation. Therefore, it is necessary to put significant

effort into mentees' preparation for the teaching profession and design curriculums or courses for mentors to be better prepared to act as competent mentors.

Keywords: *mentors' attitudes to their work with mentees; teacher mentors; teacher training in Serbia and Slovakia.*

Introduction

Understanding education as one of the basic pillars of society causes the examination of an increasing number of factors that influence the effectiveness of educational systems. One of the factors that has been gaining more and more importance in the last two decades is the training of teachers and the development of teachers' competences for the teaching profession (Auziņa, 2018; Brečka et al., 2022; Gadušová et al., 2020a; Gadušová et al., 2020b; Kriauciūnienė & Targamadžė, 2019; Mandić & Mandić, 2013; Mandić, 2023; Nikolić et al., 2017; Ristić & Mandić, 2018; Sopegina, 2016; Stranovská et al., 2017; Stranovská et al., 2018;). This training consists of two parts: theoretical preparation, which is carried out at the relevant higher education institutions, and practical training, which is carried out at primary and secondary schools. Practical training is carried out by mentors, who are more experienced teachers, while mentees can be either pre-service or novice teachers. According to Jacques (1992, p. 340), mentoring is more than the effective practice of practical, craft skills because mentors play crucial roles in shaping and reshaping mentees' identities (Tawalbeh, 2021, p. 42). Mentors provide career advising and guidance at all steps of mentees' career progression and beyond (Davis et al., 2023, p. 584). Therefore, mentees view a mentor as a model to develop a better understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses (Maphalala, 2013, p. 124) by building the foundation of their knowledge and perfecting the development of transferrable professional skills (Davis et al., 2023, p. 584). As mentees begin their careers with little knowledge of the school organisation and cultural norms relevant to it, mentors should provide guidance to mentees in navigating the new environment in terms of school routines and culture (Othman & Senom, 2020, p. 32). However, guidance and all suggestions and recommendations should be according to mentees' capabilities and needs. The difference between mentors' expectations and mentees' capabilities and needs can cause challenges and problems in their mutual relationships, which can be reflected in the entire mentoring process. Also common is the frustration of mentoring mentees who lack content knowledge and other fundamental qualities (Hoben, 2021, as cited in Jita & Munje, 2022, p. 141). One special potential sticking point is lesson planning. Lesson planning is a fundamental requirement needed for effective instruction (Ayres, 2014) because it represents a creative process that provides a framework for purposeful learning (Tantoy & Gemota, 2018, p. 72). Therefore, a strong relationship is a precondition for the successful fulfilment of the different mentoring roles in the mentoring process (Abell et al., 1995, as cited in Hagenauer et al., 2023, p. 403). If there is little conceptual understanding of mentoring, unrealistic expectations, and poorly thought-out implementation strategies (Wildman et al., 1992, p. 205), then mentees will

lose significant opportunities to learn how to teach while mentors will struggle to perform their mentoring roles effectively (Hagenauer et al., 2023, p. 403). That is why mentees must know what is expected of them. If they do not meet the mentor's expectations, the mentor might be less willing to provide constructive and sufficient feedback (Hagenauer et al., 2023, p. 403). This means that relationships accompanied by tensions and conflicts reflect negative moments, which may lead to a decline in relationship quality over time (Hagenauer et al., 2023, p. 404) and mentors to abscond their duties (Jita & Munje, 2022, p. 141). As mentoring programs have beneficial effects on job satisfaction, career success, personal development, reflection and self-direction of learning (Heeneman & de Grave, 2019, p. 1), this means that both mentors and mentees will have smaller job productivity which will be reflected on students' academic engagement, their personalities and special qualities level of content knowledge (Olfos et al., 2009, as cited in Tantoy & Gemota, 2018, p. 69). Therefore, for an effective relationship, it is vital that there is a congruency between the expectations and actual experiences of critical incidents for both mentors and mentees (Heeneman & de Grave, 2019, p. 2). Through mutual understanding and dialogue, both mentors and mentees should share their points of view according to their own classroom perceptions and experiences in order to be able to analyse classroom situations in a reflective and critical way (Tawalbeh, 2021, p. 42). The mentor explicitly communicates and demonstrates what needs to be done so that the mentee can learn and understand how the task can be accomplished (Collins, 1991, as cited in Sokhulu, 2022, p. 521). Through positive and effective relationships, mentees gain confidence, self-efficacy, reduced stress, and more career satisfaction when their activities and decisions are based on strong review and advice provided to them (Davis et al., 2023, p. 585). Because mentoring is a dynamic, active, and developmental process (Schunk & Mullen, 2013, as cited in Heeneman & de Grave, 2019, p. 2), it is important to examine and follow mentors' views on expectations and challenges related to their work with mentees in order to prevent some of the challenges and better prepare mentees for the teaching profession.

Mentoring in Slovakia and Serbia

The problem of decreasing the number of teachers and applicants for teacher training programs, as well as the drop in interest of graduates to work at schools, has been observed for some time (Gadušová & Predanocyová, 2018). This problem is recognised both in Slovakia and Serbia. The solution to this problem is higher support to teachers by their mentors in higher education institutions and schools, as well as government support. The first step is the legal introduction and definition of the term mentor. Both countries introduced this term into their school legislation; in Slovakia, it was done by Act No. 317/2009 on teaching staff and professional employees, while in Serbia, it was through the Law on the Basics of the Education System of the Republic of Serbia (2017). According to these laws, trainee teachers are appointed a mentor to help them master the program for the introduction to the teaching profession. Therefore, in both

countries, mentoring is carried out on two levels. The first level refers to initial education, in which mentees – students (teacher trainees) have a mandatory internship at school, and the second level is during the first year of work of mentees – novice teachers at the school where the training is provided by a mentor – a more experienced teacher (an older colleague). However, at the time of the acceptance of the law, there was no school policy that would introduce or support some complex systematic professional mentor training program into the practice.

Such a strategy has occurred in Slovakia as a reaction to the European Commission's initiative to help the European Union member countries to eliminate the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their economies as well as on the other sectors of their social lives, known as a proposal of a strategy for a permanent and prosperous recovery EU for next generations (NextGenerationEU; European Commission, 2021). In addition to general measures, the Council of Europe has drawn up the so-called specific recommendations (Country-specific recommendations). These recommendations were approved in April 2021. This document included a national project, Teachers for the 21st Century. Within this project, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic announced, besides others, its intention to create a network of regional centres for the support of teachers. The project included plans for establishing 40 regional centres between 2022 and 2025 (Hašková et al., 2023). As Serbia is not an EU member, there are no country-specific recommendations. However, according to the Strategy for the Development of Education and Training in the Republic of Serbia until 2030, the aim is to harmonise education regulations with international documents and initiatives. So, although there is still no systematic way of training mentors, there are advances mainly through the results of projects that focus on this issue. In order to decrease the discrepancy between school policies and practice, it is important to examine and follow mentors' views on expectations and challenges in working with mentees in order to prevent some of the challenges and better prepare mentees for their teaching profession.

Methodology

Research questions

Besides all mentors' responsibilities and roles, it is necessary to determine their expectations of mentees so that mentors can evaluate their actions and accordingly make new suggestions for mentees. Therefore, the aim of the presented research was to identify teacher mentors' views on expectations and challenges related to working with mentees in Slovakia and Serbia. Based on this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Determine the difference in Slovak and Serbian mentors' views on mentees' initial level of preparedness for the teaching profession.
2. Determine the difference in Slovak and Serbian mentors' expectations of their mentees.
3. Determine the difference in Slovak and Serbian mentors' perceptions of unpleasant situations related to mentees.

4. Determine differences in Slovak and Serbian mentors' perceptions of the most important areas of mentor training and their strengths as mentors.

Research tool

For the purposes of the research, a questionnaire was drawn up as a tool to collect the necessary research data. The questionnaire contained 47 questions (questionnaire items), of which 4 were of the general type, and 43 questions were divided into four parts: 1. mentors' perception of the mentees' initial level of preparedness for the teaching profession; 2. mentors' expectations of mentees; 3. unpleasant situations with mentees; 4. the most important areas of training parts of mentors. Out of the 43 questions, 39 of them were close-ended, in which the respondents graded the given questionnaire item using a 6-point Likert scale; four questions were open-ended, in which the respondents listed the areas in which mentees have the most common and most significant problems in their work, as well as the areas where they, as mentors, need additional training and what they see as their strengths. The Likert scale was coded so that 1 represented the lowest agreement and 6 represented the highest agreement with the given questions (statements). The determined value of Cronbach's Alpha for the created questionnaire was 0.938.

Research sample

The research sample consisted of 92 randomly selected in-service teachers acting in practice in the position of a mentor. Of the total sample of the 92 respondents, 46 were from Slovakia and 46 from Serbia. According to the gender factor, the sample included 17 male respondents (8 from Slovakia and 9 from Serbia) and 75 female respondents (38 from Slovakia and 37 from Serbia). Since teaching is perceived as a female profession, this distribution was expected and has agreed with other results (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Statistics, 2019). Due to the disproportionate distribution by gender factor, the paper did not examine gender differences. The uniformity of the number of respondents by the factor of the country could be reached in sample creation, and accordingly, comparable numbers were obtained.

Data analysis

The research was conducted from May to September 2022.

For data analysis, the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests were used within the SPSS 20.0 program for non-parametric analyses.

Results

The summary results of the Kruskal Wallis test show that there is no statistically significant difference in the mentors' views of expectations and challenges in working with mentees based on the country factor ($\chi^2 = 0.045$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). Mean rank for the Slovak respondents is 47.09, while for the Serbian respondents is 45.91. Although the mean rank is not entirely identical, the obtained result shows that there are almost the

same problems and ways of observing work with mentees in both the given European countries.

In terms of mentors' perception of the mentees' initial level of preparedness for the teaching profession, it was found that there are no significant differences between the countries on this issue ($\chi^2 = 0.055$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). The research results proved almost the same perception of the given issue, as the mean rank for the Serbian respondents was 47.15, and for the Slovak respondents 45.85. The highest agreement was obtained for the questionnaire items "they can accept criticism constructively"; "they seek and appreciate the help of a mentor"; "they are interested in their evaluation by the mentor"; and "they are interested in consulting their lesson preparations", while the lowest agreement was obtained for the questionnaire item "they take notes during consultations with the mentor".

The most common problems that arise while working with mentees can be grouped into three areas: didactics and work methodology (21 respondents, of which 15 from Serbia), preparations and documentation (16 respondents, 11 from Serbia), and class organisation and time articulation of the class (14 respondents, eight from Serbia). According to the mentioned most common problems, the most significant problems identified by Serbian respondents are related to communication with students, maintaining discipline in class, i.e. behaviour in certain pedagogical situations, and expertise (more specifically, how to explain to students how to do laboratory exercises, how to calculate specific values with graphics, etc., which is the specificity of natural sciences). Slovak respondents singled out methodology, thorough preparations for the class, and self-confidence as the biggest problems that mentees face. The obtained results show a similarity in the perceived problems, with the difference that one group of respondents marked the problems as the most common and the other as the most significant.

In order to better understand the perceived most common and most significant problems in working with mentees, the mentor's expectations of the mentee are discussed further in more detail (Table 1).

Table 1
Mentors' expectations of the mentees

Questionnaire item	Mean Rank	
	Slovakia	Serbia
independence	47.83	45.17
personal commitment	38.70	54.30
self-critical approach to one's performance	46.96	46.04
accepting mentors' opinions	42.74	50.26
accepting mentors' comments	43.26	49.74
requests for consultation of preparations, solutions to the problem	42.54	50.46
request for evaluation of preparation, their performance in the classroom	45.07	47.93
requests for materials	43.57	49.43
request for factual instruction for the lesson	43.52	49.48
inventiveness and creativity in preparing the lesson preparation	46.13	46.87

Although the Kruskal-Wallis test does not obtain significant differences between countries on this issue ($\chi^2 = 3.554$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$), the Mann-Whitney test shows a significant deviation for the item personal commitment ($\chi^2 = 9.063$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). Serbian mentors emphasised this question significantly more than Slovak mentors. In addition to this question, the Serbian mentors rated slightly more: acceptance of the mentor's opinion, respect for the mentor's recommendations, turning to the mentor for consultations and teaching aids and materials, and the expectation of instructional assistance in the curriculum implementation. On the other hand, Slovak mentors emphasised independence in work to a greater extent.

Regarding the perceived initial difficulties that can cause unpleasant feelings and stress in the work and communication with mentees, the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test show that the same situations plague both the groups of the respondents ($\chi^2 = 2.644$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). However, with a deeper look at the individual questionnaire items and the application of the Mann-Whitney test, more significant differences are registered between the mentors of these two countries (Table 2).

Table 2
Mentors' unpleasant situations with mentees

Questionnaire item	Mean rank	
	Slovakia	Serbia
shortcomings in their readiness to teach	54.35	38.65
high self-esteem and self-confidence regarding their professionalism and competencies	47.48	45.52
when they do not follow my instructions	49.20	43.80
when they disagree with my views on the analysed situations	47.37	45.63
when they assert their views	51.83	41.17
the way they communicate with me	52.98	40.02
their inability to deal with problematic situations that arise in class	54.28	38.72
their inability to communicate with colleagues	47.30	45.70
when they expect me to provide them with my teaching materials and "finished" instruction guidelines	47.85	45.15
failure to manage teacher's administrative duties	45.43	47.57

Three most considerable differences in mentors' perception of situations which cause them uncomfortable feelings and stress in connection with mentees were recorded for the questionnaire items "shortcomings in mentees readiness to teach" ($\chi^2 = 8.393$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$); "their inability to deal with problematic situations that arise in class" ($\chi^2 = 8.250$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$); and "the way they communicate with me - the mentor" ($\chi^2 = 5.624$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Mean ranks for the Slovak mentors were higher than the Serbian ones in all three questionnaire items. For the questionnaire item "when mentees assert their views", a marginal p-value was obtained. The Slovak mentors expressed greater agreement with almost all questionnaire items than the Serbian ones.

The Kruskal-Wallis test shows no significant differences between countries regarding differences in significant areas of mentor training ($\chi^2 = 1.312$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$); however, the Mann-Whitney test shows differences in certain questionnaire items (Table 3).

Table 3
The most important areas of mentor training

Questionnaire item	Mean Rank	
	Slovakia	Serbia
mentor roles and tasks	47.74	45.26
building a positive relationship with a mentee	40.33	52.67
Mentor's communication with a mentee	42.83	50.71
counselling of individual professional activities of mentees	41.01	51.96
development of a mentor's observation and evaluation competencies	45.67	47.33
formation of critical self-reflection and self-evaluation	49.54	43.46
shaping mentor's career development awareness	46.04	46.96
conflict management and stress management	44.20	48.80

The Serbian mentors perceived several important areas in mentoring more than the Slovak ones, but only for two of them a statistically significant difference was obtained. These are "building a positive relationship with a mentee" ($\chi^2 = 5.443$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) and "counselling of individual professional activities of mentees" ($\chi^2 = 4.174$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). In line with that, some Serbian mentors stated that they think they need additional support in the form of training related to formation and development of their critical self-reflection and self-evaluation; resolving conflict situations; monitoring of innovations in methodology and laws; and cooperation with other mentors; while they cited communication as their strongest point. The Slovak mentors stated that their strongest points were mental hygiene and conflict resolution.

Discussion

The aim of the presented research was to determine teacher mentors' views on expectations and challenges in working with mentees in Slovakia and Serbia. Based on the findings resulting from the research, the most common and most significant problems arising in the work with mentees can be grouped into three areas: didactics and work methodology, preparations and documentation, and class organisation and class time articulation. Similar problems have been observed in other studies. According to Moosa (2018, p. 61), for teachers to be effective, they need to have deep knowledge and a strong understanding of the subjects they teach. In addition, some studies noticed that mentees have unsatisfactory teaching skills; more concretely, they had difficulty in planning for teaching, guiding and directing the teaching-learning process, evaluating students' performance, and with classroom management (Tantoy & Gemota Jr, 2018, p. 67). The common ground of these problems is found in the lesson plans. Davidovitch (2013, as cited

in Tantoy & Gemota Jr, 2018, p. 73) noticed that lesson planning, assessments, learning objectives, and instructional strategies must be closely aligned to reinforce one another. So, the results of this and other studies point to the necessity of increasing the number of didactic and practice classes during initial education to better prepare mentees for the teaching profession. According to the perceived problems, Slovak mentors mentioned the following negative situations: shortcomings in mentees' readiness to teach, their inability to deal with problematic situations that arise in class, and the way they communicate with mentors, while Serbian mentors highlighted the personal commitment of mentees as the most important expectation. As previously stated, the problem of lack of practice was recognised earlier; the introduction of new education reforms requires changes in the initial education of future teachers, as well as additional training of mentors so that they can respond to the needs of mentees and students. For example, the introduction of inclusive education causes the need for more practice so that mentees can become familiar with as many different types of education as possible and be adequately trained to work with them. Additionally, mentees should be trained in the application of new teaching approaches and, through their practice, have the opportunity to use different approaches in order to observe their effects directly. Therefore, new educational changes require greater changes in the initial education of future teachers, which should change the mentees' readiness to teach and their ability to deal with problematic situations.

For communication between mentors and mentees, mutual understanding, dialogue, and sharing their points of view according to their classroom perceptions and experiences are necessary in order to be able to analyse classroom situations reflectively and critically (Tawalbeh, 2021, p. 42). According to Hagenauer et al. (2023, p. 411), relationships developed positively if and when mentees were treated collegially and felt acknowledged and recognised by the mentor. Therefore, through joint work and mutual understanding and dialogue, which are the basis for positive relationships, can be identified mentees' strengths and weaknesses in preparing teaching and learning activities (Othman & Senom, 2020, p. 32) and improve their practice. Serbian mentors recognised building a positive relationship with mentees and counselling them in their individual professional activities as essential areas where they would like to expand their knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

Starting from the fact that mentors can strongly influence mentees first steps in the teaching profession (Klimszová et al., 2023), the presented research aimed to look at potential differences between Slovak and Serbian teacher mentors' views on expectations and challenges in working with mentees. The results of the research showed the consistency and congruence of problems in the field of mentoring in the examined European area. The most common and most significant problems that arose in work with mentees are grouped into three areas: didactics and work methodology, preparations and documentation, and class organisation and time articulation of the class, which indicates that future changes should move in this direction of action. In particular items

of adverse situations, significant differences in mentors' views were observed; Slovak mentors also pointed out the following problems: shortcomings in mentees' readiness to teach, their inability to deal with problematic situations that arise in class, and the way they communicate with mentors; while Serbian mentors highlighted the personal commitment of mentees as the most important expectation.

Limitations and recommendations

The main limitation of the obtained research results is that the sample consisted of only respondents from the given two countries. Therefore, it is recommended that other European countries be included in this kind of research to find guidelines and potential patterns that could be followed to share experiences gained by mentors from other EU countries and to improve the quality of the teaching profession. In addition, it is necessary to consider some other aspects of mentoring to get a more complete view of the problems and challenges the mentors face. Two main recommendations can be identified; one is to reform initial mentees' preparation for the teaching profession, which will include more practical teaching hours, while the other should be directed to designing curriculums or courses for mentors to be better prepared for performing their mentor's position.

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Usporedna analiza stavova slovačkih i srpskih učitelja mentora o očekivanjima i problemima u radu s pripravnicima

Sažetak

Jedan od najznačajnijih čimbenika koji utječe na učinkovitost obrazovnoga sustava jest priprema učitelja za učiteljsku profesiju. Tu pripremu provode iskusniji učitelji, odnosno mentori. Međutim, karakteristična je značajka europskih zemalja da obuka mentora uopće ne postoji ili je njezina prisutnost minimalna. Stoga obuka pripravnika ovisi o mentorskom razumijevanju ovoga procesa, njihovim očekivanjima od pripravnika te uočenim izazovima u radu s pripravnicima. Cilj istraživanja predstavljenoga u radu bio je istražiti potencijalne razlike u stavovima učitelja mentora o očekivanjima i izazovima u radu s učiteljima pripravnicima u Slovačkoj i Srbiji. Glavni rezultati pokazali su dosljednost i podudarnost problema u mentorstvu u obje ispitivane europske zemlje. Najčešći i najznačajniji problemi odnosili su se na didaktiku i metodiku rada, pripremu i dokumentiranje, kao i organizaciju nastave i vremena. Srpski mentori naglasili su osobnu predanost pripravnika kao najvažnije očekivanje. Stoga je potrebno uložiti značajne napore u pripremu mentora za učiteljsku profesiju i razviti nastavne programe ili tečajeve za mentore kako bi bili spremniji kompetentno mentorirati.

Ključne riječi: obrazovanje učitelja u Srbiji i Slovačkoj; odnos mentora prema radu s pripravnicima; učitelji mentori.

Uvod

Razumijevanje obrazovanja kao jednoga od temeljnih stupova društva zahtijeva proučavanje sve većega broja čimbenika koji utječu na učinkovitost obrazovnih sustava. Jedan od čimbenika koji postaje sve važniji u posljednja dva desetljeća jest obuka učitelja i razvoj njihovih profesionalnih kompetencija (Auziņa, 2018; Brečka i sur., 2022; Gadušová i sur., 2020a; Gadušová i sur., 2020b; Kriaučiūnienė i Targamadžė, 2019; Mandić i Mandić, 2013; Mandić, 2023; Nikolić i sur., 2017; Ristić i Mandić, 2018; Sopegina, 2016; Stranovská i sur., 2017; Stranovská i sur., 2018). Ovo se osposobljavanje

sastoji od dva dijela: teorijske pripreme koja se provodi u odgovarajućim visokoškolskim ustanovama i praktične obuke koja se provodi u osnovnim i srednjim školama. Praktičnu obuku pružaju mentori koji su iskusniji učitelji i nastavnici, a pripravnici mogu biti budući učitelji ili učitelji početnici. Prema Jacquesu (1992, str. 340), mentorstvo je više od učinkovite prakse praktičnih, zanatskih vještina jer mentori imaju presudnu ulogu u oblikovanju osobnosti pripravnika (Tawalbeh, 2021, str. 42). Mentori pružaju stručno savjetovanje i smjernice u svim fazama razvoja karijere pripravnika i šire (Davis i sur., 2023, str. 584). Stoga pripravnici vide mentore kao modele za razvijanje boljega razumijevanja vlastitih snaga i slabosti (Maphalala, 2013, str. 124) izgradnjom temelja svojeg znanja i usavršavanjem razvoja prenosivih stručnih vještina (Davis i sur., 2023, str. 584). Budući da pripravnici započinju svoje karijere bez dovoljno znanja o školskoj organizaciji i relevantnim kulturnim normama, mentori im trebaju pomoći u snalaženju u novom okružju u smislu školske rutine i kulture (Othman i Senom, 2020, str. 32). Doduše, njihovo usmjeravanje, prijedlozi i preporuke trebale bi biti u skladu s mogućnostima i potrebama pripravnika. Razlika između očekivanja mentora i mogućnosti i potreba pripravnika može uzrokovati poteškoće u njihovim odnosima, što se može odraziti na cijeli proces mentorstva. Također je česta frustracija pri mentoriranju pripravnika kojima nedostaje sadržajno znanje i ostale temeljne kvalitete (Hoben, 2021, u Jita i Munje, 2022, str. 241). Planiranje nastave predstavlja poseban potencijalni izazov. Planiranje nastave osnovni je preduvjet za učinkovito poučavanje (Ayles, 2014) jer predstavlja kreativan proces koji pruža okvir za ciljano učenje (Tantoy i Gemota, 2018, str. 72). Stoga su snažni odnosi preduvjet za uspješno obavljanje različitih uloga mentora u mentorskom procesu (Abell i sur., 1995, u Hagenauer i sur., 2023, str. 403). S nedovoljnim konceptualnim razumijevanjem mentorstva, nerealnim očekivanjima i loše osmišljenim strategijama provedbe (Wildman i sur., 1992, str. 205), pripravnici gube značajne prilike da nauče poučavati, dok se mentori bore za učinkovito obavljanje svojih mentorskih uloga (Hagenauer i sur., 2023, str. 403). Zbog toga pripravnici moraju znati što se od njih očekuje. Ako ne ispunjavaju očekivanja mentora, mentor može biti manje sklon pružanju konstruktivnih i dovoljnih povratnih informacija (Hagenauer i sur., 2023, str. 403). To znači da odnosi koji dolaze s napetostima i sukobima odražavaju negativne točke koje s vremenom mogu dovesti do smanjenja kvalitete odnosa (Hagenauer i sur., 2023, str. 404), kao i utjecati na to da mentori izbjegavaju svoje dužnosti (Jita i Munje, 2022, str. 141). Budući da mentorski programi imaju blagotvoran učinak na zadovoljstvo poslom, uspjeh u karijeri, osobni razvoj, promišljanje i samousmjeravanje učenja (Heeneman i de Grave, 2019, str. 1), to znači da će i mentori i pripravnici imati niži radni učinak, što će se odraziti na školski angažman učenika, njihove osobnosti i posebnu kvalitativnu razinu sadržajnoga znanja (Olfos i sur., 2009, u Tantoy i Gemota, 2018, str. 69). Stoga je za učinkovit odnos od vitalnoga značaja da postoji usklađenost između očekivanja i stvarnoga iskustva kritičnih incidenata kako za mentore, tako i za pripravnike (Heeneman i de Grave, 2019, str. 2). Kroz međusobno razumijevanje i dijalog, i mentori i pripravnici trebaju dijeliti svoja stajališta u skladu s vlastitim percepcijama i iskustvima u učionici kako bi mogli reflektivno i

kritički analizirati situacije u učionici (Tawalbeh, 2021, str. 42). Mentor nedvosmisleno komunicira i pokazuje što treba učiniti kako bi pripravnik mogao naučiti i razumjeti kako se zadatak može izvršiti (Collins, 1991, u Sokhulu, 2022, str. 521). Kroz pozitivne i učinkovite odnose, pripravnici stječu samopouzdanje, samoefikasnost, smanjuju stres i više su zadovoljni karijerom kada se njihove aktivnosti i odluke temelje na pažljivoj analizi i savjetima koji im se pružaju (Davis i sur., 2023, str. 585). Budući da je mentorstvo dinamičan, aktivan razvojni proces (Schunk i Mullen, 2013, u Heeneman i de Grave, 2019, str. 2), važno je ispitati i slijediti stavove mentora o očekivanjima i izazovima koji se odnose na njihov rad s pripravnicima kako bi se spriječili neki od njih, odnosno, kako bi bolje pripremili svoje pripravnike za učiteljsku struku.

Mentorstvo u Slovačkoj i Srbiji

Problem smanjenja broja učitelja i kandidata za programe za naobrazbu učitelja, kao i smanjenja interesa diplomiranih studenata za rad u školama, već se neko vrijeme primjećuje (Gadušová i Predanocyová, 2018). Taj je problem prepoznat i u Slovačkoj i u Srbiji. Rješenje ovoga problema je povećana podrška učiteljima koju im pružaju njihovi mentori u visokoškolskim ustanovama i školama, kao i podrška države. Prvi je korak pravno uvođenje i definiranje pojma „mentor“. Obje su zemlje taj pojam uvele u svoje školsko zakonodavstvo; u Slovačkoj je to učinjeno Zakonom o nastavnom osoblju i stručnim suradnicima (317/2009), a u Srbiji Zakonom o osnovama odgojno-obrazovnog sustava Republike Srbije (2017). Prema navedenim zakonima, učiteljima pripravnicima dodjeljuje se mentor koji će im pomoći da svladaju program uvođenja u učiteljsku struku. Dakle, u obje se zemlje mentorstvo provodi na dvije razine. Prva se razina odnosi na početno obrazovanje u kojem studenti (učitelji pripravnici) pohađaju obveznu praksu u školi, a druga razina tijekom prve godine rada pripravnika (učitelja početnika) u školi u kojoj mentorstvo provodi mentor - iskusniji učitelj (stariji kolega ili kolegica). Međutim, u vrijeme donošenja navedenih zakona, u školama nije postojala politika koja je predviđala provedbu ili potporu bilo kojega složenog, sustavnog programa osposobljavanja za mentore.

Takva je strategija usvojena u Slovačkoj kao reakcija na inicijativu Europske komisije čiji je cilj pomoći zemljama članicama Europske unije u rješavanju negativnih učinaka pandemije bolesti COVID-19 na njihova gospodarstva, kao i na druge sektore njihovoga društvenog života, poznatu kao prijedlog strategije trajnoga i prosperitetnoga oporavka EU za sljedeće generacije (NextGenerationEU; Europska komisija, 2021). Uz opće mjere, Vijeće Europe razvilo je takozvane posebne preporuke (Preporuke za pojedine zemlje). Te su preporuke odobrene u travnju 2021. Ovaj je dokument obuhvaćao nacionalni projekt „Učitelji za 21. stoljeće“. U okviru ovoga projekta, Ministarstvo obrazovanja, znanosti, istraživanja i sporta Republike Slovačke, objavilo je, između ostaloga, svoju namjeru da uspostavi mrežu regionalnih centara za podršku učiteljima. Projekt je uključivao planove za stvaranje 40 regionalnih centara u razdoblju od 2022. do 2025. godine (Haškova i sur.,

2023). Budući da Srbija nije članica EU, ne postoje preporuke za ovu zemlju. Međutim, prema Strategiji razvoja obrazovanja i osposobljavanja u Republici Srbiji do 2030. godine, cilj je uskladiti obrazovne propise s međunarodnim dokumentima i inicijativama. Dakle, iako još uvijek ne postoji sustavna obuka mentora, postoji određeni napredak, uglavnom zbog rezultata projekata usmjerenih na rješavanje ovoga problema. Kako bi se smanjila razlika između školske politike i prakse, važno je ispitati i slijediti stavove mentora o očekivanjima i poteškoćama u radu s pripravnicima kako bi se spriječilo da se neki od tih izazova pojave i kako bi se pripravnici bolje pripremili za učiteljsku struku.

Metodologija

Istraživačka pitanja

Uz sve odgovornosti i uloge mentora, potrebno je utvrditi njihova očekivanja od pripravnika kako bi mentori mogli procijeniti svoje postupke i u skladu s time pružiti nove prijedloge za pripravnike. Stoga je cilj predstavljenoga istraživanja bio otkriti stavove učitelja mentora o očekivanjima i problemima povezanim s radom s pripravnicima u Slovačkoj i Srbiji. Na temelju toga cilja, formulirana su sljedeća istraživačka pitanja:

1. Utvrditi razliku u stavovima slovačkih i srpskih mentora o početnoj razini pripremljenosti pripravnika za učiteljsku struku.
2. Utvrditi razliku u očekivanjima slovačkih i srpskih mentora od svojih pripravnika.
3. Utvrditi razliku u percepcijama slovačkih i srpskih mentora o neugodnim situacijama vezanima uz pripravnike.
4. Utvrditi razlike u percepcijama slovačkih i srpskih mentora o najvažnijim područjima obuke mentora i njihovim prednostima kao mentora.

Istraživački alat

U svrhu istraživanja, sastavljen je upitnik kao alat za prikupljanje potrebnih podataka. Upitnik je sadržavao 47 pitanja (stavki), od kojih su 4 bila općega tipa, a 43 pitanja podijeljena su u četiri dijela: 1. percepcija mentora o početnoj razini pripremljenosti pripravnika za učiteljsku struku; 2. očekivanja mentora od pripravnika; 3. neugodne situacije s pripravnicima; 4. najvažnija područja obuke mentora. Od 43 pitanja, 39 je bilo zatvorenoga tipa u kojem su ispitanici ocijenili određenu stavku upitnika na Likertovoj ljestvici od 6 točaka; četiri pitanja bila su otvorenoga tipa u kojima su ispitanici naveli područja u kojima se mentori suočavaju s najčešćim i najznačajnijim izazovima u svojem radu, kao i područja u kojim kao mentori trebaju dodatnu obuku i što vide kao svoje prednosti. Likertova ljestvica sastavljena je tako da 1 odgovara najmanjem slaganju, a 6 najvećem slaganju s postavljenim pitanjima (izjavama). Određena vrijednost Cronbachov alfa koeficijenta za stvoreni upitnik bila je 0,938.

Uzorak istraživanja

Uzorak istraživanja sastojao se od 92 nasumično odabrana učitelja zaposlenih u školama koji su u zvanju mentora. Od ukupnoga uzorka od 92 ispitanika, 46 je bilo iz Slovačke,

a 46 iz Srbije. Prema rodnome faktoru, uzorak je obuhvaćao 17 muških ispitanika (8 iz Slovačke i 9 iz Srbije) i 75 ispitanica ženskoga spola (38 iz Slovačke i 37 iz Srbije). Budući da se učiteljstvo percipira kao ženska profesija, takva se raspodjela očekivala i u skladu je s drugim rezultatima (Statistika Organizacije za ekonomsku suradnju i razvoj, 2019). Zbog nesrazmjerne rodne raspodjele, članak se nije bavio rodним razlikama. Prilikom stvaranja uzorka bilo je moguće postići homogenost broja ispitanika prema državama, te su, sukladno tome, dobivene usporedive brojke.

Analiza podataka

Studija je provedena od svibnja do rujna 2022. godine.

Za analizu podataka korišteni su Kruskal-Wallis i Mann-Whitney testovi u okviru programa SPSS 20.0 za neparametrijsku analizu.

Rezultati

Sažeti rezultati Kruskal-Wallis testa pokazuju da ne postoje statistički značajne razlike u stavovima mentora o očekivanjima i poteškoćama u radu s pripravnicima prema državi ($\chi^2 = 0,045$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). Prosječna ocjena slovačkih ispitanika je 47,09, a srpskih 45,91. Iako prosječna ocjena nije potpuno identična, dobiveni rezultat pokazuje da u obje ove europske zemlje postoje gotovo isti problemi i načini praćenja rada s pripravnicima.

Što se tiče percepcije mentora o početnoj razini pripremljenosti pripravnika za učiteljsku profesiju, utvrđeno je da nema značajnih razlika između država po ovom pitanju ($\chi^2 = 0,055$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su gotovo istu percepciju ovoga pitanja jer je prosječna ocjena srpskih ispitanika bila 47,15, a slovačkih 45,85. Najveće je slaganje dobiveno na stavkama upitnika „oni mogu konstruktivno prihvatiti kritiku”, „traže i cijene pomoć mentora”, „zainteresirani su za mentorsku procjenu” i „zainteresirani su za savjetovanje o pripremi za nastavu”, dok je najmanje slaganje uočeno na stavci upitnika „zapisuju bilješke tijekom konzultacija s mentorom”.

Najčešći problemi koji se javljaju u radu s pripravnicima mogu se grupirati u tri područja: didaktika i metodika nastave (21 ispitanik, od čega 15 iz Srbije), pripreme i dokumentacija (16 ispitanika, 11 iz Srbije) te organizacija nastave i raspodjela vremena u nastavi (14 ispitanika, osam iz Srbije). Prema spomenutim najčešćim problemima, najznačajniji problemi koje su identificirali srpski ispitanici odnose se na komunikaciju s učenicima, održavanje discipline u učionici, odnosno ponašanje u određenim pedagoškim situacijama te iskustvo (točnije, kako objasniti učenicima kako izvoditi laboratorijske vježbe, kako izračunati određene vrijednosti pomoću grafikona itd., što je specifičnost prirodnih znanosti). Slovački ispitanici istaknuli su metodiku, temeljitu pripremu za nastavu i samopouzdanje kao najveće izazove s kojima se suočavaju pripravnici. Nalazi pokazuju sličnosti u percepciji problema, s tom razlikom što je jedna skupina ispitanika probleme označila kao najčešće, a druga kao najznačajnije.

Da bismo bolje razumjeli najčešće i najznačajnije probleme u radu s pripravnicima, o očekivanjima mentora od pripravnika detaljnije se raspravlja u nastavku (Tablica 1).

Tablica 1

Iako Kruskal-Wallis test nije otkrio značajne razlike među državama u tom pitanju ($\chi^2 = 3,554$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$), Mann-Whitney test pokazuje značajno odstupanje u stavci „osobna predanost” ($\chi^2 = 9,063$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$). Srpski učitelji su ovome pitanju pridodali znatno veću važnost od slovačkih. Uz ovo pitanje, srpski mentori ocijenili su i nešto više: prihvaćanje mišljenja mentora, poštivanje preporuka mentora, obraćanje mentoru za konzultacije i nastavna pomagala i materijale te očekivanje pomoći u provedbi nastavnoga plana i programa. S druge strane, slovački su mentori u većoj mjeri naglašavali neovisnost u radu.

Što se tiče uočenih početnih poteškoća koje mogu uzrokovati neugodne osjećaje i stres u radu i komunikaciji s pripravnicima, rezultati Kruskal-Wallisova testa pokazuju da se obje skupine ispitanika suočavaju sa sličnim situacijama ($\chi^2 = 2,644$, $df = 1$, $p > .05$). Međutim, dubljim uvidom u pojedine stavke upitnika i primjenom Mann-Whitney testa otkrivaju se značajnije razlike između mentora iz ove dvije države (Tablica 2).

Tablica 2

Tri najznačajnije razlike u percepciji mentora o situacijama koje im uzrokuju nelagodu i stres u vezi s pripravnicima zabilježene su u stavkama upitnika „nedostaci u spremnosti pripravnika za podučavanje” ($\chi^2 = 8,393$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$); „njihova nesposobnost da se nose s problematičnim razrednim situacijama” ($\chi^2 = 8,250$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$); i „način na koji komuniciraju sa mnom – mentorom” ($\chi^2 = 5,624$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). Prosječne ocjene slovačkih mentora bile su veće od ocjena srpskih mentora za sve tri stavke upitnika. Za stavku upitnika „kada pripravnici iznose stavove” dobivena je granična p-vrijednost. Slovački mentori izrazili su veće slaganje s gotovo svim točkama upitnika od srpskih mentora.

Kruskal-Wallis test nije otkrio značajne razlike među zemljama u pogledu razlika u važnim područjima obuke mentora ($\chi^2 = 1,312$, $df = 1$, $p > 0,05$); međutim, Mann-Whitney test je pokazao razlike u nekim stavkama upitnika (Tablica 3).

Tablica 3

Srpski mentori snažnije su doživjeli neka važna područja mentorstva od slovačkih, ali je statistički značajna razlika primijećena samo kod dva područja. To su „izgradnja pozitivnoga odnosa s pripravnikom” ($\chi^2 = 5,443$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$) i „savjetovanje o individualnim stručnim aktivnostima pripravnika” ($\chi^2 = 4,174$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). U skladu s tim, neki srpski mentori izjavili su kako smatraju da im je potrebna dodatna podrška u obliku obuke koja se odnosi na formiranje i razvoj njihove kritičke samorefleksije i samoprocjene; rješavanje konfliktnih situacija; praćenje inovacija u metodici i zakonodavstvu te suradnja s drugim mentorima, istodobno su komunikaciju smatrali svojom najvećom prednošću. Slovački mentori izjavili su da su njihove najveće prednosti mentalna higijena i rješavanje sukoba.

Rasprava

Cilj predstavljenoga istraživanja bio je utvrditi stavove učitelja mentora o očekivanjima i problemima u radu s pripravnicima u Slovačkoj i Srbiji. Na temelju rezultata istraživanja, najčešći i najznačajniji problemi koji se javljaju u radu s odjelima mogu se grupirati u tri područja: didaktika i metodika rada, priprema i dokumentacija te organizacija nastave i raspodjela vremena u nastavi. Slični problemi primijećeni su i u drugim istraživanjima. Prema Moosa (2018, str. 61), da bi učitelji bili učinkoviti, moraju imati duboko znanje i razumijevanje predmeta koje predaju. Nadalje, u nekim je studijama primijećeno da pripravnici imaju loše učiteljske vještine; preciznije, imali su poteškoća s planiranjem nastave, usmjeravanjem obrazovnoga procesa, procjenom učeničkih postignuća i upravljanjem razredom (Tantoy i Gemota Jr, 2018, str. 67). Zajednički faktor ovih problema nalazi se u pripremama za nastavu. Davidovich (2013, u Tantoy i Gemota Jr, 2018, str. 73) primjećuje da planiranje nastave, ocjenjivanje, nastavni ishodi i strategije poučavanja moraju biti usko povezani kako bi se međusobno podupirali. Rezultati ovoga i drugih istraživanja stoga ukazuju na potrebu povećanja broja didaktičkih i praktičnih aktivnosti u početnoj fazi osposobljavanja kako bi se pripravnici bolje pripremili za učiteljsku struku. Što se tiče uočenih problema, slovački mentori primijetili su sljedeće negativne situacije: nedostatak spremnosti pripravnika za poučavanje, njihovu nesposobnost da se nose s problematičnim razrednim situacijama te način na koji komuniciraju s mentorima, dok su srpski mentori istaknuli osobnu predanost pripravnika kao svoje najvažnije očekivanje. Kao što je ranije rečeno, problem nedostatka prakse već je prepoznat, provedba novih obrazovnih reformi zahtijeva promjene u početnom osposobljavanju budućih učitelja, kao i dodatnu obuku mentora kako bi mogli odgovoriti na potrebe pripravnika i studenata. Primjerice, uvođenje inkluzivnoga obrazovanja uzrokuje potrebu za većim brojem sati prakse kako bi se pripravnici mogli upoznati sa što više različitih vrsta obrazovanja i adekvatno se obučiti za rad. Uz to, pripravnike se treba osposobiti za primjenu novih pristupa u poučavanju i uporabu različitih pristupa u praksi kako bi izravno promatrali svoje rezultate. Stoga nove obrazovne promjene zahtijevaju velike promjene u početnom osposobljavanju budućih učitelja, što bi trebalo promijeniti spremnost pripravnika za poučavanje i njihovu sposobnost rješavanja problematičnih situacija.

Komunikacija između mentora i pripravnika zahtijeva međusobno razumijevanje, dijalog i razmjenu stajališta o nastavnim percepcijama i iskustvima, kako bi mogli refleksivno i kritički analizirati nastavne situacije (Tawalbeh, 2021, str. 42). Prema Hagenauer i sur. (2023, str. 411), pozitivni se odnosi razvijaju ako i kad se mentori prema pripravnicima odnose kolegijalno i kad pripravnici osjećaju da ih mentori prihvaćaju. Stoga, kroz timski rad, međusobno razumijevanje i dijalog, koji su osnova za pozitivne odnose, moguće je identificirati prednosti i slabosti pripravnika u pripremi nastavnih aktivnosti (Othman i Senom, 2020, str. 32) i poboljšati njihovu praksu. Srpski su mentori prepoznali kako su izgradnja pozitivnih odnosa s pripravnicima i savjetovanje pripravnika o njihovim individualnim stručnim aktivnostima važna područja u kojima žele proširiti svoja znanja i vještine.

Zaključak

Polazeći od činjenice da mentori mogu snažno utjecati na prve korake pripravnika u učiteljskoj struci (Klimszová i sur., 2023), predstavljeno istraživanje imalo je za cilj istražiti potencijalne razlike u stavovima slovačkih i srpskih učitelja mentora o očekivanjima i izazovima u radu s pripravnicima. Rezultati studije pokazali su dosljednost i podudarnost problema u mentorstvu na istraživanom europskom prostoru. Najčešći i najznačajniji problemi koji se javljaju u radu s pripravnicima grupirani su u tri područja: didaktika i metodika rada, priprema nastave i dokumentacija, kao i organizacija nastave i raspodjela vremena u nastavi, što ukazuje da bi se buduće promjene trebale kretati u tom smjeru. U vezi s nepovoljnim situacijama uočene su značajne razlike u stavovima mentora; slovački su mentori ukazali na sljedeće probleme: nedostatak spremnosti pripravnika za poučavanje, njihovu nesposobnost da se nose s problematičnim razrednim situacijama te način na koji komuniciraju s mentorima, dok su srpski mentori naglasili osobnu predanost pripravnika kao svoje najvažnije očekivanje.

Ograničenja i preporuke

Glavno ograničenje dobivenih rezultata studije jest da se uzorak sastojao samo od ispitanika iz dvije države. Stoga se preporučuje da se i druge europske države uključe u ovu vrstu istraživanja kako bi se pronašle smjernice i potencijalni obrasci koji bi se mogli slijediti za razmjenu iskustava mentora iz drugih država Europske unije i za poboljšanje kvalitete učiteljske struke. Potrebno je razmotriti i neke druge aspekte mentorstva kako bi se steklo bolje razumijevanje problema i izazova s kojima se mentori suočavaju. Mogu se identificirati dvije glavne preporuke: jedna je reforma početnoga osposobljavanja pripravnika za učiteljsku struku, koja bi uključivala više praktičnih sati poučavanja, dok bi se druga trebala usmjeriti na razvoj kurikula ili tečajeva za mentore kako bi ih se bolje pripremilo za obavljanje mentorske uloge.

Napomena

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