



Original research article

Promoting diversity and national minority education in midwifery and nursing in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938): A historical analysis

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Abstract

Introduction: The independent Czechoslovak state, established in 1918, had to cope with the multi-ethnic aspect of its many areas. Only 65% of the population belonged to the state that made up the Czechoslovak nation; the rest were national minorities, most of whom were Germans (24%). The multi-ethnic aspect of the state affected all aspects of state life, including health care and medical education.

Aim: The aim of this study was a historical analysis of contemporary primary and secondary sources dealing with the issue of education of national minorities in selected non-medical professions in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic (during the 1920s).

Methods: Historical data were collected in the archives of Most, Děčín, Karlovy Vary, Opava, Cheb, Košice–Rožňava selected monastic archives, the National Archives, and the Kramerius digital library of the National Library of the Czech Republic.

Results: The new Czechoslovak Republic made it possible for members of the national minority to receive full training in midwifery and nursing in their native language, thus ensuring full linguistic access to midwifery and nursing care.

Conclusions: Midwifery education in the First Czechoslovak Republic was conducted in Czech, Slovak, German and Hungarian, at separate midwifery schools. In the case of nursing education, even more space was offered to members of the national minority, mainly thanks to private order nursing schools.

Keywords: Czechoslovak Republic; Education; Midwifery; Minority; Nursing

Introduction

One of the main prerequisites for complete and holistic care – whether this be nursing or obstetric – is the competent linguistic and cultural approach of the health professional toward the patient. Today, this is a universally accepted fact, but the question is how the state approached this issue a century ago, at a time when, on the one hand, the collective national identity had the highest integration potential and, on the other, nation-states were being created that were multi-ethnic in nature, but whose governance was based on preferring the state-forming nation at the expense of national minorities. The First Czechoslovak Republic, for example, can serve as a model for a historical excursion, where almost 24% of the population at that time was made up of Germans. The establishment of the Czechoslovak state in 1918 brought many issues and problems in the field of education of non-medical profes-

sions. The Czechoslovak state was artificially created from two countries. Firstly, from the territory of the former Kingdom of Bohemia and the territory of Upper Hungary. Until 1918, the Slovak nation did not possess any independence or statehood (Farkašová, 2010; Kutnohorská, 2010). The new republic had to deal with significant health issues, such as poor social conditions, malnutrition in some social classes, poor sanitary conditions in hospitals, the incidence of infectious diseases (smallpox, typhoid fever, diphtheria, scarlet fever) and, last but not least, tuberculosis. Measles, whooping cough, scarlet fever and diphtheria were the most common causes of child mortality (Svobodný and Hlaváčková, 2004). The role of the new Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education in the new state was to adequately respond to the elimination of infectious diseases, reduce infant mortality, and promote public health (Ilievová et al., 2020). The Czechoslovak state was not united in health care as some laws issued under the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy continued to apply after the es-

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establishment of the new state. For example, as stated by Ilieová et al. (2020), Order of the Ministry of Interior No. 68/1870 was in effect in the Czech part of the territory, while in the Slovak territory, Hungarian Regulation Act of Public Health No. IV/1876 was used. The Ministry of the Interior later revised these laws. Kutnohorská (2010) refers to a circular from the Czech provincial government dated 21 March 1913, which ordered the establishment of a nursing school at all hospitals. A law that strongly affected the education of non-medical professions was the Reich Law of 30 April 1870 No. 68, and Regulations from the Minister of the Interior on the treatment of occupational patients (1914) No. 139 – regarding the treatment of occupational diseases. This regulation stipulated that the Ministry of the Interior must approve medical schools. It also demanded that the school cooperated with hospitals to offer practical training in the most important disciplines (Bébr, 1929; Bébr and Chaloupka, 1937).

National diversity of society in the First Czechoslovak Republic

The foundation of a nationally diverse new state required the Republic to introduce minority education. Based on the 1921 census, there were 13,374,364 inhabitants living on the territory of Czechoslovakia, and it was found that only 8,760,937 citizens belonged to the state-forming Czechoslovak nation. The most significant minority were citizens of German nationality (3,123,568; 23%). These lived in the border areas of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. In Slovakia, Germans lived in Bratislava, central Slovakia, and Spiš. Hungarians constituted the second largest community in the new republic, numbering 745,431, mainly on the territory of Slovakia. According to the census, the Hungarian minority constituted 5.5% of the total population. As many as 461,849 citizens were Carpatho-Rusyns, and 75,853 were Poles (State Statistical Office, 1925). As Petráš (2009) states, the protection of national minorities after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was to be guaranteed by the treaties of the Paris Peace Conferences.

Research question

This study poses the research question: How was nursing and midwifery education provided to minority-community students in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic?

Materials and methods

Design

This was qualitative study, analysis of historical sources. The purpose of this study was a historical analysis of contemporary primary and secondary sources that deal with the issue of education of national minorities in selected non-medical professions in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic in the 1920s.

Methods

Direct and indirect, progressive, and retrospective methods were used to investigate the issue. We collected historical sources from the archives of Děčín, Karlovy Vary, Most, Cheb, Opava, Košice, Rožňava, the Congregational Archives of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Trnava, the Congregational Archives of the Grey Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi in Lomec, the Kramerius Digital Library of the National Library of the Czech Republic, and the Slovak National Archive in Bratislava.

Results and discussion

Issues in the education of students at midwifery schools

From a national perspective, our findings from the journal Health Bulletin of 16 July 1898, published by the Society of Czech Physicians, were remarkable. At that time, the Central Association of German Physicians demanded that the Prague Midwifery School be divided into Czech and German parts. Each part had its own Head and assistants. These “separate” tendencies were a part of the broader efforts of the diverse Czech-German society in the Czech lands in the last third of the 19th century to separate existing educational institutions into purely Czech-speaking and Czech-German ones (see the division of Charles-Ferdinand University into separate Czech and German parts in 1882, or the division of the original Prague Polytechnic into separate Czech and German parts in 1869). The journal also reports that the German Medical Association wanted to have Germans as heads and assistants. Only those proficient in German were admitted to the German Midwifery School; Czech speakers would have been excluded. In the Časopis lékařů českých [Journal of Czech Medical Doctors] of 21 November 1903, we can see a similar problem with the Midwifery School (school for midwives, 1903). In this journal, Zentralverein Deutscher Ärzte (in Böhmen) argued that it was necessary to open a school with German as a language of instruction, because German students were at a disadvantage. It also recommended that their training be transferred to the summer months when professors were on holiday, and suggested that pupils in clinical practice did not have enough opportunities to see deliveries. It further requested that German should be the official language in all facilities where midwives worked. An unknown author of Czech nationality talks about the problems of differences in the teaching of midwives in Czech and German. He points out that German medical departments cannot be staffed only by German staff with German documentation, as a patient “from our people”, i.e. of Czech origin, may be admitted.

From an interview with the Minister of Health, Vavro Šrobár, we found that there were no Slovak midwives on the territory of Slovakia after 1918, because those who worked there had studied before 1918 at Hungarian-language-based schools and thus spoke Slovak poorly or not at all (Czech midwives in Slovakia, 1919).

After the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the situation changed. Education in midwifery schools was unevenly distributed because the new state was made up of two countries. According to Wiesner (1923) – who describes the development of midwifery education in Czechoslovakia – for the teaching and service at midwifery schools, a general regulatory order was issued by the Ministry of Teaching in agreement with the Order of the Ministry of the Education on 27 January 1889, Reich Law No. 35. According to this law, midwifery teaching was available free, and professors held theoretical and practical courses in local languages. Women under 40 years of age and unmarried could be admitted to midwifery schools, and the best age was considered to be 24 yrs. After admission, applicants were required to submit a baptismal certificate or birth certificate, possibly a marriage certificate or death certificate of the husband, a certificate of morals, a health certificate, a certificate of physical fitness, and a certificate of vaccination. Next, the applicants had to take an exam where they had to prove that they knew the language of instruction in both spoken and written form. Studying at

a midwifery school was to take less than five months. When the Czechoslovak state was established, there were two midwifery schools available on the Czech territory. According to a new Decree of the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education (1920a), No. 4421/I, one course at a midwifery school lasted five months, and women with higher education could be admitted to study. According to a Decree of the Ministry of Public Health and Physical Education (1920b), No 8467/I, students at midwifery schools were to acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the following subjects: infectious diseases, disinfection and sterilization, anatomy and physiology of women, the role of a midwife in childbirth, care of the child in the six weeks after birth (puerperium), nutrition of children, and abortion. This decree also allowed 50 female candidates to be admitted to the study.

In addition to midwifery training at independent midwifery schools, midwives were irregularly trained at individual hospitals. For example, in 1927, a circular was issued by the provincial political administration in Prague, according to which two midwifery courses were to be held in the first half of 1928; namely in Brno at the Obstetrician-gynecology clinic of Masaryk University (in Czech language), and in Olomouc at the provincial maternity hospital (in German language). The duration of the study was set at six months. Candidates had to be no older than 40 and no younger than 20, and had to provide documents showing that they met most of the requirements listed above (Provincial Political Administration in Prague, 1927; State District Archive Karlovy Vary, 1927).

An important document concerning the organization of midwives was published before 1914 and updated in 1920. This was the Statutes of the Central Union of Midwives in the Czechoslovak Republic (Provincial Political Administration in Prague, 1920). The document clearly set out the union's tasks, which consisted primarily of supporting the health authorities, raising the status of midwives and gaining respect for the profession, promoting professional education, or publishing a professional journal (State District Archive Cheb, card 22). During the 1920s, midwifery teaching became more established – theoretically, practically, and in terms of nationality. In the western half of the republic (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia), there were two separate state midwifery schools in Olomouc and Brno. The one in Olomouc was Czech-speaking, and the one in Brno was German-speaking. In the 1927/28 school year, 61 students were enrolled at the Olomouc Midwifery School and 38 at the Brno Midwifery School. Interestingly, all the students at the Olomouc Czechoslovak-speaking school were of Czechoslovak nationality, while at the Brno German-speaking school, 8 of the 38 students enrolled were of Czechoslovak nationality (Czech Statistical Society, 1929). In Slovakia, after 1918, the teaching of midwifery was first taught only in the Czechoslovak language. However, we have found archival records (Detached Office of the Ministry of Public Health, 1919/26) showing that from 1922 onwards, midwifery courses in Hungarian and German were also held at the Bratislava State School of Midwifery. Soon after, however, in addition to the Czechoslovakian-language midwifery schools, which operated in Bratislava and Košice, a separate bilingual German-Hungarian midwifery school was established in Bratislava. In the 1927/28 school year, the Czechoslovak-speaking school in Bratislava enrolled a total of 44 students, and the Czechoslovak-speaking school in Košice a total of 48 students. All students in the Bratislava school were of Czechoslovak nationality, and one student was of German nationality in the Košice school. In the bilingual German-Hungarian Grammar School in Bratislava, 28 students were enrolled in the 1927/28

school year, 10 of whom were of German nationality and 18 of Hungarian nationality. There was also one school for midwifery education in Carpathian Ruthenia, which mainly aimed to educate Ruthenian-speaking midwives (we will not deal with this in detail here). Thus, in 1927/28, 52% of the students of midwifery schools were trained to perform midwifery in German or Hungarian, while only 48% were trained in Czechoslovak. This fact implies that due to the proportional representation of Czechoslovaks and Germans in the overall composition of the population, the proportional share of students studying in the German language at the midwifery schools in 1927/28 was more advantageous, since there were statistically 0.0007 Czechoslovak-speaking students per Czechoslovak-speaking population, and 0.002 German-speaking students per German-speaking population. Thus, we can conclude that Czechoslovak education provided a linguistically and culturally complete holistic approach to midwifery education for German-speaking mothers. We can assume that in German-speaking areas of the country, the vast majority of women had unproblematic access to German-speaking midwifery. The same can be stated for the Hungarian national minority, but for the Polish national minority, the opposite was true, since there was not a single Polish-language midwifery school in the republic (Czech Statistical Society, 1929). The positive situation for German-speaking inhabitants of the First Czechoslovak Republic was also evidenced by the numbers of midwives organized in the Central Union of Midwives at the beginning of the second half of the 1920s, where it should be stressed that membership of midwives in this professional union was not compulsory and the total number of midwives in the republic cannot be ascertained. However, even the numbers of organized midwives from 1925 to 1927 show a significant representation of German-speaking midwives, whose numbers grew continuously. In 1925, there were 3,172 Czech and 428 German organized midwives in Czechoslovakia. In 1926, the number of Czech organized midwives dropped to 3,154, but the number of German organized midwives increased to 530. In 1927, the Central Union of Midwives registered 3,229 Czech and 679 German organized midwives (National Archives, f. 622). The positive attitude of the German-speaking population towards German-speaking midwives in the First Czechoslovak Republic, which did not change even in the later period, was also shown by other interesting archival material found during our research of Czech and Slovak archives, specifically in the Košice-Rožňava State Archive. This archival document demonstrated that there was good availability of German-speaking midwives, not only in the western – i.e., the more developed part of the Czechoslovak Republic – but also in the eastern half of the republic, and in Slovakia, where there was a large German community. In the local archives of the Rožňava we found a comprehensive list of midwives of the local district from 1932, which can be described as traditionally multicultural, because in addition to the large population of those with Czechoslovak (55.6%) and Hungarian nationality (35.1%), there was also a significant German community (4.2%). The list indicates the language skills of 53 of the 55 midwives. Eight (15%) spoke German, which is more than three times the proportion of Germans in the local population (Czech Statistical Society, 1934; State District Archive Košice, Rožňava, f. 10185/932).

Issues in the education of students in nursing schools in Bohemia

Due to the tremendous cultural diversity of the Czech, Moravian, and Silesian societies, nursing education was provided in

nursing schools with Czech and German as the languages of instruction. In his article, Noyes (1922) writes that, in 1914, the Ministry of the Interior of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy approved the establishment of a nursing school in Prague, but the school was not opened until 1916. Before the school was founded, the pupils were forced to study either in Vienna or Germany. Noyes (1922) also draws attention to the fact that Austrian (German-speaking) nurses established their own system of training inpatient care at the General Hospital in Prague. According to Mánková (1932), on 29 May 1916, a Czech school for patient care was founded at the General Hospital in Prague, where 15 pupils were admitted based on a ministerial decree. The admitted pupils had to first undergo a three-month probationary period before being admitted for the next two years. Only Czech students were allowed to have a dorm, which was located in Ječná Street. Later, they also opened a German nursing school, where the Head of the school was a Reich German nurse. This school lasted until the end of the First World War. After 1920, the Czechoslovak Red Cross administered the school, enabling it to have contacts with the American and French Red Cross. Eventually, two American nurses arrived from the American Nursing Service (Marion G. Parson and Alotta M. Lentell) to help Czech nurses raise the school's quality and education standards. At the same time, two Czech nurses were awarded a two-year scholarship to study in the U.S., with the goal that upon their return to Czechoslovakia, they would be placed in charge of the nursing school in Prague (Mánková, 1932; Noyes, 1922). In January 1922, the Czechoslovak Red Cross opened a nursing school in Moravská Ostrava (at the People's University), the study program lasted three months. During the last weeks of the course, practical exercises in hospitals were held, and the lectures took place in the evenings from 18:00 to 20:00. The school aimed to educate nurses who would go on to choose this activity as their life's mission, and educate other women from all walks of life—in case of emergency they could then help nurses in hospitals (Regional Archive Opava, 1922).

German Christian Order nursing schools in the Czech, Moravian, and Silesian territories

In the past, various Christian orders were closely associated with nursing. As reported by Kutnohorská (2010), nursing schools with German as the language of instruction in the Czech, Moravian, and Silesian territories functioned in the towns of Cheb, Chomutov, Varnsdorf, Frývaldova, and Opava. The German-Czech School of the Sisters of Charity of the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi in Opava began its activities in 1924 when, under the direction of Dr. Urbánek, the head of the hospital in Opava, they began to teach nursing courses. A noteworthy entry is found in the memoirs of P. Leander Brejcha O.F.M. (1930), stating that Czech nursing students were educated in German to acquire practical knowledge of the German language and that German students were taught some subjects in Czech.

Issues in the education of students in nursing schools in Slovakia

Nursing education in Slovakia was closely linked to the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy in Bratislava. The nursing school was inaugurated on 2 November 1931 and operated until 1950, when, for security reasons, Christian religious orders were closed by the communist regime. Nurse Maria Fides Dermeková, who received her nursing education at the Prague State School, became the school's first superior, meeting both the language and personality criteria. Founding a

nursing school was not easy. As the Chronicle of the Nursing School of the Merciful Sisters of St. of the Cross (1931) states, nurse Fides Dermeková had to solve many problems in the first years. These were usually related to personnel and material-technical equipment for the nursing school. One problem was the language barrier for female students. Students lacked a background in the Slovak language, and because of this, in November 1934, an open tutorial course in the Slovak language was offered to nurses, students, and applicants to the nursing school. Another problem was textbooks, which did not exist in the Slovak language. According to the Chronicle of the First Nursing School, examples of the statutes, curriculum, and teaching texts were provided by the German Nursing School in Chomutov. Nurse Fides Dermeková was responsible for translating German into Slovak and adapting the documents to local needs. The criteria for admission to this school were as follows: between 16 and 30 years of age, graduation from a municipal school, good physical and developmental condition, and compassion for nursing. A significant handicap of nursing education in Slovakia was the absence of Hungarian-language nursing education. From the above, it is evident that nursing education in the First Czechoslovak Republic was more strongly favored German than the Czechoslovak language, thanks to churches or order schools in the Czech lands that operated in the Sudetenland.

Nationality statistics of the state nursing schools

Let us look at the national statistics of state nursing schools, which in the period we are researching were located only in the Czech lands. There were two Czechoslovak schools in Prague and two German schools (Prague and Chomutov). In the 1927/28 school year, 84 students studied at Czechoslovakian-language nursing schools, and 62 at German-language nursing schools (four of whom were of Czechoslovak nationality). Of all nursing students enrolled in state nursing schools in the Czech lands, 57.5% studied at Czechoslovakian-language schools and 42.5% at German-language schools. Based on these conditions, it can be stated that the training of German-speaking nurses was not neglected by the state in any way, ensuring that the German national minority was continuously provided with full access to nursing care in their native language. However, the situation was the opposite for Hungarian and Polish national minorities (Czech Statistical Society, 1929). The above-mentioned strong position of German-language nursing education in Czechoslovakia persisted in the following years, as evidenced by archival documents from the Ministry of Health and Physical Education. These documents show that the State General Hospital in Prague relied on German-speaking nurses for its nursing staff, for whom the Ministry of Health had to relax its full compliance with the language law and accept a minimum knowledge of the state language. They were required to prove their knowledge of the Czechoslovak language (at least at the level of being able to master simple speech in the Czechoslovak language), which they were obliged to demonstrate, or were required to take examinations following regulations on the linguistic competence of state employees (Government Decree No. 17/1926 Coll.).

Conclusions

The beginnings of midwifery and nursing education during the First Czechoslovak Republic were complicated. There were two different laws for health care, which caused inequality, and some parts of the republic had different levels of development.

For the Czech, Moravian, and Silesian parts of the republic, the laws of the former Habsburg Monarchy applied, while Hungarian laws applied to the Slovak territory and Carpathian Ruthenia. Another problem was the constant shortage of medical staff. Our historical analysis showed that midwifery and nursing education was readily available in the German language in the First Czechoslovak Republic, which gave members of the German national minority equal linguistic access to both midwifery and nursing care. Moreover, in nursing education, there was a better opportunity to be educated in German than in the state language of Czechoslovakia. Despite this, full linguistic and cultural access to midwifery and nursing education via separate schools was not equally accessible to the Hungarian and Polish national minorities. In the case of these national minorities, the duality of the Czechoslovak state administration's approach to the then national minorities is also evident in the field of education, including medical education.

Author contributions

MC: Study design. MC, VT, AT, LN: Data collection. MC, VT, AT: Data analysis and interpretation, drafting the manuscript. MC, VT, LN, AT, VH, IK: Revising the manuscript critically for important intellectual content, commenting and editing. All authors have given final approval of the version to be published.

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Ethical aspects and conflict of interests

Ethical approval was not required for this study. The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

Podpora diverzity a národnostně menšinového vzdělávání v porodní asistenci a ošetrovatelství v první Československé republice (1918–1938): historická analýza

Souhrn

Úvod: V roce 1918 ustavený samostatný československý stát se musel v řadě svých oblastí vyrovnávat se svým mnohonárodnostním aspektem, kdy ke státotvornému československému národu patřilo jen 65 % obyvatelstva, zbytek tvořily národnostní menšiny, z nichž nejvýraznější podíl ve výši téměř 24 % patřil Němcům. Mnohonárodnostní aspekt státu tak ovlivňoval všechny složky života státu, včetně zdravotnictví i zdravotnického vzdělávání.

Cíl: Cílem studia je analyzovat primární a sekundární historické zdroje týkající se vzdělávání sester a porodních asistentek se zvláštním ohledem na německou národnostní menšinu.

Metodika: Sběr historických údajů jsme realizovali v archívech Česká Lípa, Most, Děčín, Karlovy Vary, Opava, Cheb, ve vybraných řeholních archívech, v Národním archívu a v digitální knihovně Kramerius Národní knihovny České republiky.

Výsledky: Nová Československá republika umožnila příslušníkům německé menšiny se plnohodnotně vzdělávat v porodní asistenci a ošetrovatelství v rodném jazyce, čímž byl příslušníkům německé menšiny zajištěn jazykově plnohodnotný přístup k porodní asistenci a ošetrovatelské péči.

Závěr: Na základě historické sondy můžeme konstatovat, že vzdělávání v první Československé republice v porodní asistenci na samostatných školách pro porodní asistentky probíhalo v českém, slovenském a německém jazyce. V případě vzdělávání v ošetrovatelství byl nabídnut ještě větší prostor příslušníkům národnostní menšiny, a to především díky soukromým řádovým zdravotnickým školám.

Klíčová slova: Československá republika; menšiny; ošetrovatelství; porodní asistence

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