

Social and Communication Competences of Students: Future Teachers

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Abstract

Numerous studies have shown that teachers significantly shape student's learning context. Socially and emotionally competent teachers tend to develop supportive and encouraging relationship with their students by promoting intrinsic motivation, focusing on student's strengths and abilities, mediating through conflict situations and encouraging appropriate communication and prosocial behaviour. Teachers with good communication skills will create a more successful teaching and learning ambience for the students, and without communication, the teaching and learning process will not take place. Educators, parents and public today recognize the need for an educational agenda to improve academic performance, but also to enhance students' social and communicational competence. The aim of the present study was to examine social and communication competence of the students of educational sciences and teacher education at the University of Zagreb Department Of Croatian Studies. As part of the most important aspects of the future educational work, the participants pointed out independence at work, the awareness that they would contribute to the future of the society and the awareness that they play a useful role in society. Participants also expressed optimism about their communication skills with students, planning and organizing teaching process and maintaining discipline, and to some less extent their competences for successful cooperation with students' parents. Results were discussed in terms of possibilities to contribute to future teachers' education.

Keywords: Social, Communication Competences, Students, Future Teachers

Introduction

Quality, expertise and pedagogical competencies of teachers significantly determine the level of educational achievement of the students, so future teacher education is an

important aspect of education policy of each country. Educational systems in European countries differ in many specificities, but what they all have in common is a strong tendency for harmonization (Vidović, Vlahović-Štetić, Pavin, Rijavec, Miljević-Riđički and Žižak, 2005).

Studies of perception of the students' needs emphasize the need for social and communication competencies development; the skills of cooperation with students, parents and other participants of the educational process, while the opinion polls of high school teachers indicate the need for quality fundamental psycho-pedagogical training and methodology with the purpose of preparing to face real and concrete situations and problems.

The requirement for educational work with students is formal pedagogical-psychological-didactic-methodical education, in other words, acquired pedagogical competencies. Individual characteristics of the educational process, such as teaching practice, monitoring and evaluating students' obligations and further professional training, are also regulated by specific regulations. In addition to professional-pedagogical alterations and new trends, there is an increasing need for systematic professional training of teachers in the field of information-communication technologies and the corresponding methods.

In order for teachers to do their job successfully, their education must be in line with the expectations of practice. Building a knowledge-based society is based on the quality and continuous improvement of the system of education and science, the meaning recognized by the most developed states, and education and science were proclaimed as the basis of development (Zrno, 2012). Requirements of the modern educational system are focused on the continuous development of pedagogical competencies: the teacher should be communicative, develop informatic literacy; it is necessary to continuously evaluate their own level of competence, and to develop personal emotional and social adaptation at the same time (Ninčević, 2013). Teacher takes new tasks and appears in a new role, rarely following given concepts and increasingly using reflective practice and the exploratory, critical and creative situational approach (Sučević, Cvjetičanin & Sakač, 2011).

Therefore we have examined students' perceptions of the teaching profession of competencies that are important for teaching, with the purpose of facilitating assessment of the area that should be specifically emphasized in teacher education, in the opinion of those participants directly involved in educational process. In the present study students of teaching studies were asked about importance of competencies for quality teaching and on the quality of the education in which they participate or have participated. Participants were students of University of Zagreb.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in the present study were students of teaching studies whose Master's Programs were in Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, Pedagogy, Latin, History, Croatology, Croatian language and literature and Religious science. A total of 201 students of the University of Zagreb participated in the study. Their age ranged from 19 to 28 years ($M=24.1$). Seventy-two percent of the participants were female and twenty-eight percent male participants. The selection of participants was based on willingness to participate in the research.

Instrument and procedure

Questionnaire used in the present study was Pedagogical competence profile of students. Participants assessed their personal level of specific pedagogical competences. Demographic questions examined age, gender, college, study and study year. The study was conducted by the method of online surveys. The paper used empirical results obtained by self-assessment.

Results

Table 1. Importance of certain aspects of teaching profession

	M	SD
Everyday work with students	4,16	,932
Compatibility of work and private life	4,29	,735
Intellectual interest in the profession	4,32	,798
Salary level	3,47	,891
Employment security	4,15	,917
Leisure and holidays	4,24	,791
Independence in work	4,39	,638
Social status	3,64	,942
Awareness of making a useful role in society	4,30	,752
Awareness of doing good for the future of society	4,36	,724

Participants were asked to assess the importance of specific aspects of teaching profession. They assessed the importance of individual knowledge and skills by evaluating their agreements with a total of 10 statements on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was *completely irrelevant* and 5 was *absolutely important*. As shown in *Table 1*, students assessed independence in work, awareness of doing good for the future of society as well as making a useful role in society as most important. Salary and social status were assessed as least important aspects of work.

Table 2. Self-assessment of social and communication competence

	M	SD
Dealing with social and emotional problems of students I will teach	3.45	0.80
Teamwork with other teachers	3.51	1.04
Classroom discipline maintaining	3.69	0.91
Not letting the pupils notice that I'm provoked	3.98	0.97
Effective communication with pupils	4.07	1.00
Cooperation with parents	3.79	0.91
Social and communication competence in general	3.36	0.46

Participants then assessed the level of their own social and communication competence. Factor analysis revealed one latent variable, named social and communication competence in general. Observed individually, effective communication with pupils was assessed as the most developed competence. Participants anticipate difficulties in terms of dealing with social and emotional problems of students they will teach and teamwork with colleagues – other teachers. Surprisingly, classroom discipline maintaining and cooperation with parents were in the middle, not highlighted as the most problematic areas, which was expected according to previous studies.

Discussion

Defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes needed for efficient work (Vizek Vidović, 2009), competences are important factor in quality and effective teaching. In order to solve the problem in a responsible way, a person should possess a range of professional, methodological, social and personal competencies (Frey, 2004, as cited in Palekčić, 2008). Professional competence refers to disciplinary-oriented areas of ability, methodical competence to the thought and active ability to work within the defined professional area. Social competence implies the ability to achieve the goal in co-operation with others, and the personal competence abilities needed to act responsibly and motivated.

The estimates of students, future teachers, emphasize the need for greater emphasis on practical work, linkage of the teaching material, orientation to the development of social and professional competences and subject didactics training (Palekčić, 2008). Studies also point out the need for development of skills to cooperate with students, parents and other participants in the educational process, as well as the need for quality basic psycho-pedagogical training and methodology for the purpose of preparing for real and concrete situations and problems (Vidović et al., 2005). In the present study, participants evaluated the competence of teaching, specifically, social and communication competences, as very important for quality teaching. Participants

also assessed competence to cooperate with colleagues as the least expressed. It is possible that students assess individual items about collaborations as less important for work in education, since they do not have a concrete experience in communication with parents, pupils, colleagues, and associates.

The results are in line with the expectations and past studies that, by examining the perception of the education system of teachers and students, pointed out the need to improve the quality of initial teacher education, the acquisition of teaching competences related to various aspects of communication and cooperation, both with students and other participants in the educational process, and the need for practical experience early in the education process (Vizek Vidović et al., 2005). This research attempted to point out the need for the development of certain areas of competence that active participants in the educational process assessed as most needed, given that active and continuous work on their own cognitive, emotional and social competences is one of the fundamental preconditions for developing a quality pedagogical profile of teachers within the contemporary education system (Čirić, 2016).

Conclusion

In the present study, students of teaching studies assessed the importance of pedagogic competencies. Students assessed the pedagogical and didactical competencies as very important for successful teaching. The study pointed out the need for development of competencies during study and later in different forms of lifelong education.

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