

Pedagogical Competencies of Modern Foreign Language Teachers in Macedonia as perceived by University Professors

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Abstract

In the process of education, especially in elementary schools, the teacher has an important role in shaping young people and building social relationships. Even in the 21st century, which abounds with modern means of communication and information knowledge, the teacher is one of the key figures in the learning and personality development processes of the young people. Therefore, in addition to professional, vocational or expert education background, teachers should have a thorough pedagogical education, i.e. pedagogical competencies. Their role is not only to present the content knowledge of their specific field subject he teaches, but also to manage the complex process of learning and supporting students in their development as persons, not only as learners.

This research was conducted in the higher educational institutions in Macedonia which train future teachers. It aims at examining the attitudes of university professors in terms of the perceived level and adequacy of the acquired competencies of English language teachers in the primary educational context. The data collected via a questionnaire suggests a lack of some key pedagogical competencies in teachers. There seems to be an immense need for teachers to do additional pedagogical courses to prepare them for the challenges of primary English language teaching.

The analytical method will be used to convey their answers alongside with a short description of the study training programs for the EL teachers in the Macedonian educational system as well. The conclusion suggestions will follow in the end.

Keywords

Pedagogical competencies, primary school, English language teachers, initial education, Macedonia

I. Introduction

The innovators in the history of pedagogical science including Comenius, Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Herbart, Frebel, Spencer, Dewey, Montessori Pjazhe, Hutchinson, Brunner and others point out that the possibility of realizing the teacher's role is diverse: a teacher is to adapt to the steps, content, subject and methods of learning, to give support to those who learn through empirical and other methods of teaching, to teach naturally with love and through various methods, gradually to develop intellectual and physical abilities of their students, to shape the experience and the environment of the student, to support and direct them by the use of various didactic materials, to teach according to the levels of the cognitive development and children's age, to encourage learners in searching for the truth and contribute for their active participation in problem solving situations. This way the one who learns acquires human qualities: to think, to create moral social relations, to develop love and interest in the work that contributes to the satisfaction and motivation, encouraging the development of creative thinking and imagination. They talk about the need for harmonious development of the body and mind, and about the need for the intellectual work, moral, aesthetic and religious education with the aim "to develop positive and to mitigate and prevent negative traits. In this process the teacher is the subject alternately with the disciple in the awakening the capacity and individuality of the child, he is acknowledged decent working person with an illuminating role of a reformist.

Aneta Barakovska would point out that "nowadays in Macedonia the attention is drawn to the education as a fundamental determinant of changing consciousness, values for building a democratic civil society, a society enabling opening a process for the qualitative changes in the lives of the citizens or a person." (Barakovska, 2008) In fact the teacher as a practitioner and a direct participant in the process of transformation of the value systems and as a communicator of new scientific knowledge has the major task, function and social responsibility and therefore there is a need to expand the current initial pedagogical education which will

serve as a support in dealing with the scientific and technological revolution challenges. The young generations, valuable for the parents and for society as a whole, are entrusted in his hands, where family education is being upgraded and extended. Working with children requires a teacher with a young spirit, engaged in the struggle for the new and the better and who is active in the overall life of the community. So Tolstoy said, "When the teacher combine the love with work and the pupils, then he becomes a perfect teacher." Comenius speaks of a "so dignified role that no other under the sun exists", Belinsky talks about an "important profession, great and holy, as he holds the destiny of a human life in his hands."

The social significance of the teacher mentioned above is reflected in his skills and competencies to form healthy young people and channel their abilities for their own wellbeing and for the benefit of the society as well. He is the mediator of the scientific knowledge and social aspirations in order the kids to learn about the world around them and their responsibilities and acts. "He is expected to be the base and the one who implements the society progress. He stands out as the most important factor in education." (Banchotovska S., p 47).

Therefore, in addition to his vocational education the teacher should have a thorough pedagogical education. His role is not just to present his professional knowledge of the subject he teaches, but also the ability to manage the complex process of learning by the pace of the child in a way to build and form personalities simultaneously through the content in order to teach them for the real life. The teacher is required to be skilled in his work, and the skill to interpret the knowledge, in a manner and level accessible to students, requires additional basic pedagogical skills.

Therefore future learning and the schools need a higher level of pedagogy involvement and development and humanization of the educational process, so the function of the teacher according to the futurologists will become increasingly more complex and accountable.

II. The Competencies Of A Modern Language Teacher In A Modern School

The phrase “modern school” is used a lot to indicate the implementation of teaching recently and in this century, and here in MKD it is often denoted as a “school in transition” aimed not only at technological transformation but also change in the programmes objectives, the philosophy and overall methodology of education.”Modern strategists on school reform agree that the contemporary school can grow and develop only on the positive heritage of classical and new school and we talk more and more about differentiation and individualization of teaching and for the scientification of the school.” (Ratkovic, page 14). For these purposes it is often compared to the European school and we talk about the compatibility between the European and our School when making comparative analyzes. “The complex type of organizing teaching classes in which the student works alone and develops his capabilities is more and more highlighted in a classroom scene, where the center of teaching are the student and the teacher simultaneously.” (Ibid) This kind of teaching requires profile of a teacher who directs his pupils towards various sources of knowledge, who animates and cheers them for an independent work and creativity. In order for the education to be in function of development and education of young people it must have a suitable and qualified teaching staff, trained and having acquired fundamental, thorough pedagogical competencies in order to meet the challenges of a modern society, school and quality teaching.

A. The framework of professional standards and criteria of teaching competencies acquired by teachers aim to define the necessary competencies of teachers at various stages of their professional career, specifically provides professional standards in the teacher’s development starting with the initial stage as a qualified teacher status to the level of professionals possessing teaching advanced skills. Professional standards are statements of the professional attributes of teachers, their professional knowledge and skills. As an example we point to those of English Department of Education, with a focus on the areas in which the competencies should be implemented. They are detailed statements of teachers’ competences divided in the three subgroups:

I. Professional attributes of the teacher covers the statements of having acquired knowledge and skills in *relations to young people, the legal framework of teaching, communication skills and co-working with others and personal professional development of a teacher*

II. Professional knowledge of the teacher includes statements about *teaching and learning, assessment and monitoring, curriculum and the subjects, literacy, numeracy and ICT, and achieving, diversity and mental and physical health.*

III. Professional teacher’s skills covers statements about the skills and knowledge of teachers’ *planning, teaching, assessment, monitoring and giving feedback, reflection and review of teaching learning, learning environment, teamwork and cooperation, etc.* and participation in his continuing professional development as a responsibility of the teacher.

B. The Taxonomy of Susana N. Banchotovska exposed in the paper “The Professional competences of teachers” covers the professional competencies of teachers in terms of the subject qualified and

pedagogical competencies. Subject qualified competences are more general and refer to the skills and knowledge in the field discipline of the subject he teaches and pedagogical ones are classified into taxonomic categories which are subcategorized (here summarized into 4 categories):

I. Subject Professional competencies relating to skills, abilities and knowledge the teachers own in the field of the subject he teaches

II. Pedagogical competencies:

1. Teacher’s competences in terms of the creation and implementation of the curriculum
2. Pedagogical competencies regarding the student himself
3. Pedagogic competencies in terms of their own teacher person experience and as an expert in the teaching profession
4. Pedagogical competencies relating to the cooperation in and out of the school

C. The concept of the Key Competences which is being developed, run and implemented in EU countries for different ages and levels, covers categorizing the skills needed to be further developed by each citizen in order to adapt himself to a constantly changing world. They are defined as “a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context.” (Official journal of the European Union, 2013) The European framework covers eight core competencies.

1. Communication in the mother tongue
2. Communication in foreign languages
3. Math competence, basic competence in science and technology
4. Digital competence
5. Learning to learn competence
6. Social and civic competencies
7. Entrepreneurships competence
8. Cultural awareness

“The Concept of education for the life is fully expressed in the continuing qualification of the teaching staff. The social significance stems from the necessity of the continuous increase of qualifications and competencies which encourages and is incentive for the development of school children and youth and intellectual growth of the society.” (Jevtic, 2011)

III. Research

On the basis on the above described competencies that teachers should possess after their graduation we prepared a short questionnaire aimed to examine the views and opinions of the university professors who teach future English teachers at higher institutions in terms of the level of possessing the necessary pedagogical competencies and in the terms of the need of strengthening the pedagogical skills being acquired at university (teachers colleges) by increasing the number of pedagogical subjects taught at universities. The hypotheses regarding this issue is that University Professors have positive views regarding the proliferation of pedagogical subjects and consider that the teachers do not acquire sufficient pedagogical competencies during their university initial education in order to deliver teaching in a modern classroom. In order to determine this task in accordance with the research objectives we implemented appropriate survey

techniques - questionnaire and scaling. The sample of participants consists of 23 professors from the universities departments that prepare future teachers of English.

IV. Analysis and Interpretation of The Survey Results

The results of the questionnaire are presented in tables containing data of the distribution frequency (f) and the percentage (%).

Question 1 aims to examine the attitude of professors regarding the level of representation of pedagogical disciplines in the education of future teachers. It is a closed type question with three possible answers.

Table 1 - Question 1

Table 1		Answers	
Question 1		f	%
	What is your attitude in terms of the presentation of the number of the pedagogical disciplines in the study programmes of the initial education for the English language teachers?		
a.	They are sufficiently represented	8	34,78 %
b.	They are partially represented	12	52,18 %
c.	They are not sufficiently represented	3	13,04 %
Total		23	100 %

The biggest part of the professors expressed partial representation (52,18%), smaller number of survey participants (34,78 %) think they are sufficiently represented, and 13,04 % consider they are not sufficiently represented.

Table 2 Question 2

Table 2		Answers	
Question 2		f	%
	According to you to what extent during their initial studies are your students qualified and competent to deliver and realize English language teaching program in schools?		
a.	They are sufficiently trained and qualified	8	34,78 %
b.	They are partly trained and qualified	15	65,22 %
c.	They are insufficiently trained and qualified	0	0 %
Total		23	100 %

Question 2 is trying to give a global overview of the competence level of the students t.i. English future teachers in practical teaching. The question offers three possible answers and the statements listed in the table no.2 point to the professors' attitude that the most part of future teachers are partially qualified to deliver the English language teaching (65.22%) and 34.78% of them claim that are sufficiently qualified for teaching, which favours the hypothesis of insufficient pedagogical competence during students' initial education required to implement the teaching program realization of English.

Question 3 from the questionnaire is aimed to obtain information about whether a study group program to educate future teachers needs a greater number of pedagogical subjects and if there is a need for further education of those who have already acquired the status of a teacher.

We can conclude from the data that the respondents agree that 4 to 6 subject courses are needed in the initial education of future teachers (56.52% of respondents), 26.09% of professors think that the degree program preparing English teachers should have more than 6 pedagogical subjects and the smallest number of the respondents believe that 3 subjects are sufficient (17.39%).

Table 3 - Question 3

Table 3		Answers	
Question 3		f	%
	In your opinion, how many pedagogical subjects a degree program preparing English teachers should have?		
a.	1-3	4	17,39 %
b.	4-6	13	56,52 %
c.	More	6	26,09 %
Total		23	100 %

This clearly points to the fact about the positive attitude of professors on the proliferation and expansion of teacher training courses in correlation with related disciplines such as methodology, sociology, psychology, social pedagogy, special education and other disciplines in the initial education of future teachers.

Question 4 is open-type question: "Please specify some difficulties that teachers commonly encounter in the implementation of English language teaching arising from the lack of pedagogical competencies." In the biggest part of the evidence there is a clear indication of the lack of the pedagogical competencies necessary to address the challenges of teaching practice which confirms our view that the teachers encounter more difficulties related to the implementation of the educational objectives of English language teaching and deficiency of acquired pedagogical competencies for teachers in realization of the teaching practice.

Professors have cited the following as difficulties, here shortly summarized: a lack of didactic materials, teachers are insufficiently qualified; there is a gap between university theory and teaching practice in schools, quality mentoring of new teachers; need for increasing the number of hours of practice in the classroom during the university programme study; a need for a specialized study program for the fourth year at higher institutions; make laws and obligations for teachers with no adequate training; structural reflection, evaluation and assessment; planning; work with special needs students; discipline and appropriate pedagogy for different students; pedagogical administration and others.

Question 5 refers to the need for further education of teachers' in order to deepen their pedagogical competencies. We note that no one from the respondents ticked "not necessary" as a response, and most of them (86.96%) declare that re-education through additional training is needed to a big extent. Minimum of the respondents take the neutral position.

Table 4 – Question 5

Table 4		Answers	
Question 5	In your opinion how much is it necessary to organize additional educational training, seminars and workshops on the development of pedagogical skills for English teachers?	F	%
a.	To a big extent	20	86,96 %
b.	Partly	2	8,69 %
c.	We can not estimate	1	4,35 %
d.	It is not necessary	0	0 %
Total		23	100 %

This clearly shows the awareness of the University Professors about the fact that teachers are insufficiently trained with the necessary pedagogical and specific competences and there is a need to extend and deepen them. It confirms our claim for their lack in the initial teacher education.

As we compare the given indicators we can see 86.96% of respondents professors who train future English teachers believe that there is a great need for additional training for further development of the teachers' pedagogical competencies. It leads to the conclusion that the initial education has insufficient number of pedagogical subjects to enrich general and specific competencies required for teaching in primary schools.

The last question of the questionnaire, **Question 6**, is an open one and aims to express the recommendations of professors who prepare future teachers in strengthening their pedagogical competences. It reads: "In your opinion what are the future challenges and recommendations for strengthening pedagogical competences in the initial education of the English teachers?" The answers given are summarized in the fifth part of our paper entitled as a conclusion and discussion.

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V. Discussion and Conclusion

At the end of the interpretation data we can sum up the results and make conclusions. Undoubtedly we conclude that university professors have very clear views on the challenges of modern teaching which requires changes in initial education of future teachers and its modernization. They suggest further theoretical knowledge and study courses in pedagogy and methodology, in other related disciplines, changes in terms of practical work and its duration, changing the criteria for the status of a teacher, full implementation of ECTS criteria and they suggest sharing experiences with the EU community, close monitoring and support of the teacher who has already graduated etc. which complies with our hypotheses. They particularly emphasize that teachers after completing higher education are insufficiently trained with the necessary pedagogical and specific competences which need further extending.

Based on the data, findings and results in the paper some directions will follow on strengthening the pedagogical competencies of future teachers of English and other foreign language:

1. Change in curriculum programs at higher education institutions in terms of pedagogical subjects and increasing their number;
2. Amendments and changes in educational practice and systematic mentoring and objective evaluation of teachers

through establishment of multi-merit system of evaluation of teachers

3. To determine specific criteria and standards for professional teacher status and criteria for quality teaching
4. Research in the other subject areas on different teaching faculties which prepare future teachers identically.
5. Constantly motivating the educational worker for lifelong learning and improvement of the educational process and the status of teacher of the 21st century

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Author Profile



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