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**THE INDIVIDUAL STUDY – COMPETENCE SPECIFIC TO
STUDENTS OF THE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM**

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Abstract

The initial and continuous formation of the teaching staff implies the development of certain professional competences, but also of certain transversal competences. In this present study, we are interested in the way in which the competence for individual studying is developed in the students enrolled in the teacher training program and we aspired to establish the sub-competences relevant in this context, to which we have subsumed their characteristic activities as well. Following that line of thought, we have initiated a research through which we endeavored to determine the opinions of the teaching staff (those that teach the students of the teacher training program) in what concerns the manner in which they strive to develop this competence in their students. Thus, we were concerned with finding out the methods through which the teachers process and systematize the information during lectures and seminars with the purpose of facilitating the individual study of the students, in what manner the students' reflection is being stimulated during said lectures and seminars, and the modalities through which the retention of information by the students is facilitated with the aim of enabling their individual studying. The present study encompasses the results of this research, and these results determine us to consider that the self-study of the future teacher must involve didactic activities through which reflection becomes one of the primary elements, as we consider that through reflection the student achieves control over his own learning process.

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Keywords: Competence; sub-competence; students; teacher training program; prospective teachers.

1. Introduction

The present study aims at presenting the results of the research we have undertaken concerning the way in which the teaching staff develops the competence for individual studying in their students. Furthermore, based on those findings, we intend to establish the sub-competences necessary to the



development of the competence for individual studying, while simultaneously identifying the types of didactical activities specific to each sub-competence.

‘Competence is the ability to perform activities related to an occupation or function at the standard defined by the employers’ (National Curriculum and Vocational Qualifications). The competency-based system on which the occupational standards for the progression in a teaching career relies on assumes and adapts the categories and levels of competence with which the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the Qualifications Framework in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (NQFHE) operate with to the specific of the teaching profession and to the requirements of the Romanian educational system (Potolea, & Toma, 2013). Thus, the initial and continuous formation of the teaching staff relies on the competency-based approach and on the concept of cumulative development of the competence level (The Methodology of Continuous Professional Development). The specialized competences are defined in accordance with the NQFHE Methodology, the professional competences which we wish to ingrain into prospective teachers referring to the cognitive dimension (knowledge, understanding and the use of specific language, explanation and interpretation) and to the functional-actional dimension (application, transfer and problem solving, critical and constructive reflection, creativity and innovation) (Potolea, & Toma, 2013). The transversal competences concern autonomy and responsibility, social interaction, and personal and professional development (Potolea, & Toma, 2013). We consider that for the future teaching staff, the competence for individual studying (with its specific sub-competences) is absolutely necessary. It is for this reason that we consider it beneficial to dedicate an exhaustive analysis to it, in this context.

We regard individual studying as being a professional competence which involves an integrated array of abilities and skills for the application, the operation, but especially for the transfer of the pedagogical acquirements, abilities which enable the efficient conduct of an activity, in our case namely the didactic activity, and the functional use of the didactical knowledge, acquirements, and skills within varied educational contexts (Jucan, 2009). We consider that the development of the competence for self-study in the students enrolled in the teacher training program (and not only) is achieved during lectures, and especially during seminars.

2. Research Methodology

In order to determine the opinions of the teaching staff regarding the methods for stimulating the development of the competence for individual studying in students, we have designed and administered a semi-structured interview to 12 members of the academic staff who teach the students enrolled in the teacher training program, an interview comprised of 10 questions. We were concerned with determining the modalities through which the members of the academic staff process and systematize the information in lectures and seminars with the purpose of facilitating the self-study of the students, in what manner the students’ reflection is being stimulated during said lectures and seminars, and the methods through which the retention of information by the students is facilitated with the aim of enabling their individual studying.

3. The Findings of the Research

For the question ‘Do you make use of charts, diagrams, tables, cognitive organizers in order to help students study easier, individually?’ the answers were as follows:

Table 1. The distribution of answers on the second item of the interview guide

Do you make use of charts, diagrams, tables, cognitive organizers during teaching in order to help students study easier, individually?	Answers
Never	2
Usually no	5
Usually yes	3
Always	2

The majority of the teachers interviewed, a number of five, have answered that they generally do not use charts, diagrams, tables, cognitive organizers during teaching in order to facilitate the students’ individual studying. Only three of the professors interviewed have stated that they generally use charts, diagrams, tables, cognitive organizers during teaching. Only two members of the academic staff have stated that they always employ charts, diagrams, tables, cognitive organizers during their teaching. The teaching style of the remaining two members of the academic staff, according to their statements, never include charts, diagrams, tables, and cognitive organizers. The conclusion reached, in this case, is that teachers do not seem to be interested in the manner in which they synthesize the information taught to the students with the aim of, subsequently, facilitating their understanding during their self-study.

By studying the fifth item of the interview guide, we intended to determine to what extent the teachers are concerned with ascertaining whether the students have understood the content taught or the learning tasks (by asking questions), to thus aid the students’ self-study.

Table 2. The distribution of answers on the fifth item of the interview guide

Do you ask questions of the students in order to verify the understanding of the content or learning tasks and to facilitate, in this manner, their individual studying?	Answers
Never	3
Usually no	5
Usually yes	3
Always	1

‘Always’ is the answer given by one teacher, and a number of three teachers have answered that generally, yes, they do ask questions of the students in order to enable their individual studying. The majority, namely five of the members of the academic staff interviewed, have answered that they do not usually ask questions of the students with the purpose of promoting their individual studying, and three of the teachers have claimed that asking questions in order to verify the extent of the students’ understanding of the content or of the learning tasks is not a method used by them. The distribution of the answers given by the teachers on this item indicates that teachers place a higher emphasis on the transmission of the informational content and are less focused on the students’ understanding and on individual studying.

Through the sixth item of the interview guide, we aim to determine whether the teachers are

directly interested in creating moments for reflection or for individual study during the lectures or seminars.

Table 3. The distribution of answers on the sixth item of the interview guide

Do you create moments for reflection or for individual study during the courses/seminars?	Answers
Never	3
Usually no	5
Usually yes	3
Always	1

Out of the interviewed teachers, three of them have stated that they generally strive to create moments for the students' reflection or individual study during their lectures or seminars, and five of them have answered that they usually do not create moments for reflection or for self-studying. The answers at the extremes of the scale were offered by a small number of teachers, only a single teacher stating that during their classes and seminars they always create moments for the students' reflection and individual study, and three teachers have answered that they never create said moments of reflection or individual study during their lectures or seminars. It is worrying that the interviewed teachers do not seem concerned with exploiting the students' reflectiveness during the teaching-learning process, nor with providing opportune moments for the students' individual studying during lectures or seminars.

The seventh item of the interview guide refers to the students' individual studying process, namely the approach they use in relation to a specific learning task.

Table 4. The distribution of answers on the seventh item of the interview guide

Do you ask the students to describe the moment of individual studying underwent in relation to a certain learning task?	Answers
Never	5
Usually no	4
Usually yes	2
Always	1

The answers obtained on this item indicates that the interviewed teachers are not preoccupied with the manner in which their students study individually, the answers given by them being as follows: five of the teachers have stated that they never ask their students to describe the approach they have used in solving a task, four of the teachers have declared that they generally do not ask of their students that, when they have a task, they should describe the moment of individual studying, two of the teachers have answered that they generally ask the students to describe the learning process they use when they have a certain task, and only a single teacher has stated that they always ask the students to describe their studying process.

The analysis of the answers to this question of the interview leads us to the conclusion that the teaching staff is more centered on the teaching process, to the detriment of the observation of the individual study process.

The eighth item from the interview guide asked the teachers to identify the concrete methods through which they consider that they would be able to support the retention of information by students and, implicitly, their individual study.

One of the teachers offered the following answer to this item: ‘For the themes that I approach, I will attempt to use teaching methods that are as interactive as possible and ask the students to demonstrate that they have understood the content, by applying what I have told them in a practical manner.’

Table 5. The distribution of answers on the eighth item of the interview guide

Please list at least three methods that you wish to employ in order to facilitate the students’ individual studying	Answers
I will teach with the use of modern methods	9
I will make use of modern teaching aids	9
I will employ diagrams	7
I will use explanation as a teaching method	4
I will write down on the blackboard the important ideas	4
I will emphasize the important ideas during teaching	3

We have introduced this particular item in order to verify if the teachers performed any personal reflections concerning the methods they use in order to facilitate the individual study of the students, methods which, due to the variety of answers obtained, have been grouped in categories and ordered based on their frequency.

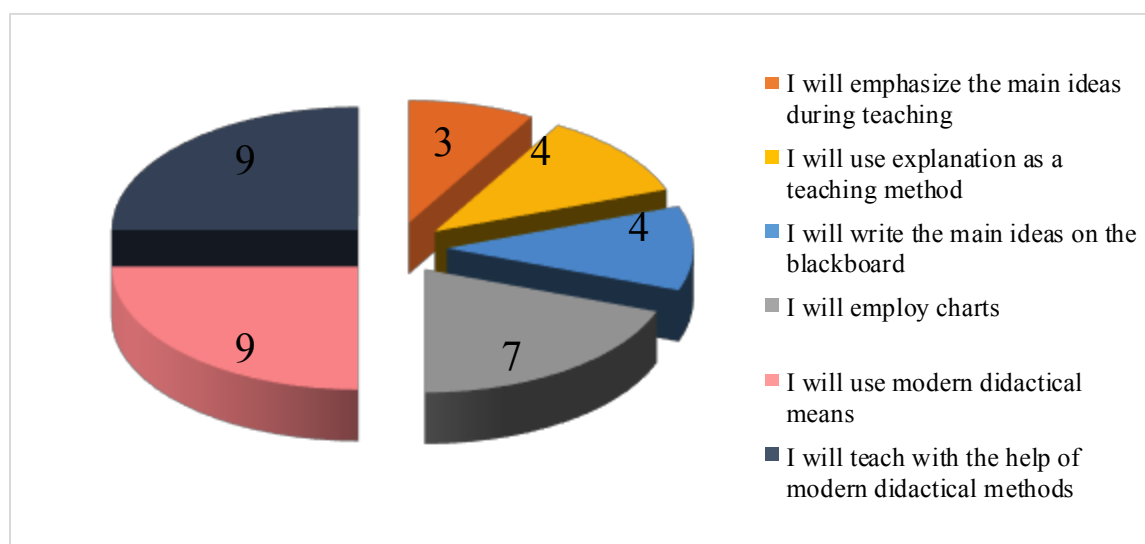


Fig. 1. The distribution of answers on the eighth item of the interview guide

We can observe that the modalities preferred by the teachers and aimed at facilitating the retention of information by the students are as follows: nine answers were centered on employing modern didactical methods, another nine answers referred to teaching with the help of modern teaching aids, seven answers stated that the teachers will employ charts, four answers claimed that they will use explanation as a teaching method, another four answers specified that they will start writing down the

main ideas on the blackboard, and the final three answers opted for emphasizing the important ideas during their teaching. These answers indicate, nonetheless, the readiness of the teachers to facilitate the students' self-study by assuming the role of mediator and mentor in the students' learning process, through their involvement and the use of modern didactical means. The answers demonstrate that the teachers do, in fact, want to help the students, they want to enable the individual studying of the students, practically, they aspire to streamline their teaching style.

4. The Conclusions of the Conducted Study

The conclusions of the conducted study lead to the idea that in the framework of efficient teaching, most of the teachers are focused on the transmission of contents and less on exercising the skill sets necessary to the students during their self-study; the teachers attach great importance to understanding the informational content and less to the methods through which they can facilitate the students' individual studying; the teachers do not appear to be concerned with the individual study the students employ for their discipline; the teachers do not associate efficiency in learning with the ability of the students to describe the process undertaken in their self-study. However, a gratifying aspect is the fact that the teachers interviewed wish to employ modern didactical methods and want to teach with the use of modern teaching aids, and in this manner, facilitate the individual study of the students.

5. Conclusions

Consequently, we consider that through the learning situations presented during lectures and seminars, the teaching staff can develop in the prospective teachers the competence for individual studying, through the following sub-competences (Jucan, 2009), which we will analyze in what follows and we will associate their related activities:

- The ability to understand the pedagogical information and knowledge;
- The ability to explain, analyze and exemplify them;
- The continuous development of a personal reflection process;
- The ability to realize connections between the pedagogical contents;
- The ability to organize and systematize the didactical knowledge within the individual study;
- The ability to take notes in a systematic, organized and structured manner.

In order to be able to transmit information in accordance with the current standards, the future teachers must have an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter and demonstrate intellectual mobility, so that they would be capable of helping the pupils to create 'cognitive maps', to operate with connections between varied ideas, and to address biases (Jucan, 2009).

Teachers must know how to structure the interdisciplinary connections and how to apply the theoretical ideas to everyday activities. This type of understanding provides the foundation for knowledge of the subject matter, from a pedagogical perspective, a fact which enables the prospective teacher to transmit said knowledge and make it accessible to others (Shulman, 1987).

5.1 Developing the Ability to Comprehend Information and Knowledge of a Pedagogical Type

Teaching others means first and foremost understanding the goals, the deep structures of the subject being taught, and the fundamental ideas promoted by said subject matter, as well as those ideas which have an effect outside of the strict framework of the discipline. The prospective teachers must understand ‘what’ they are teaching and, where possible, they must comprehend this issue in multiple manners (Tăușan, 2016).

Comprehension at the level of the objectives is extremely important. Through the activities during the courses and seminars of the teacher training module, the teaching staff engages in the pedagogic process (of teaching) in order to achieve the following educational goals:

- Instilling intellectual curiosity and the desire to acquire new information into students, by presenting the educational objectives, using accessible language, at the beginning of each course and seminar;
- Helping the students achieve a broader understanding of the information accumulated by using graphic organizers, modern teaching methods, predominantly, explanation and problem-solving during seminars;
- Helping the students to develop a number of skills and a system of values required for the integration in a society of liberty and justice (Shulman, 1992); helping the students to accept the evolution of their responsibility, teaching them to trust others and manifest respect towards them, by putting forward models of good practice;

5.2 Developing the Ability to Reflect upon the Pedagogical Content

Reflection represents a mental process which, when applied to the act of learning pedagogical content, stimulates the students to make use of their critical reasoning in the examination of the information presented to them, question its validity, and reach conclusions based on the resulting ideas. This continuous process enables the students of the teacher training module to restrict the area of possible solutions and, ultimately, draw a conclusion. The result of this effort is the achievement of a better understanding of pedagogical concepts. Without reflection, the learning of didactical content becomes ‘lacking in the reorganization of reasoning imposed by an in-depth learning’ (Ewell, 1997). The situations of self-study in which efficient learning is achieved require thinking time. The students think of themselves as individuals that are learning, all the while evaluating their own cognitive processes used to decide which are the best strategies. They will then be able to apply this new information when confronted with a future learning situation, either in pedagogy, or a different discipline. The teachers, during their lectures and seminars, will, therefore, strive to create learning situations in which students must employ their critical thinking in regards to given problem situations, to explain these, to find solutions and original methods for resolving problematic situations.

5.3 Developing the Ability to Explain, Analyze and Exemplify the Pedagogical Content

The possibility to understand the foundation of the knowledge of pedagogical activities lies at the intersection between the content and the elements of pedagogy, and consists of the capacity of the

prospective teacher to transform the knowledge of the content in forms that are less influential from a pedagogical perspective, but adaptable to the variety of abilities of the students. The didactic activities undertaken in this context, aim at the possibilities of the student teacher to deduce, describe, explain, and analyze the educational phenomenon by making connections, initiating debates, exemplifying within educational contexts.

5.4 The Continuous Development of a Personal Reflection Process within the Pedagogical Act

Reflection implies the revision, reconstruction, restoration, and critical analysis of the personal didactical abilities, followed by synthesizing these observations with the intent of instituting changes that may improve the future teacher's performance. This is generally what a teacher does when they analyze their activity in retrospective – reconstructs, restores, remembers events, feelings, and personal achievements. Lucas (as cited in Ornstein, Thomas, & Lasley, 2000) has argued that reflection is an important element of professional evolution. All prospective teachers must learn to observe the outcomes and determine the causes for their success or failure. The learning situations during the lectures and seminars of the teacher training program will center, therefore, on examples of good practice, which will allow the students to observe, to critically analyze, to reflect, and especially to argue their chosen approach.

5.5 Developing the Ability to Realize Connections between the Pedagogical Contents, to Structure and Restructure the Information, the Ability to Organize and Systematize the Didactical Knowledge during the Individual Study

Through acts of teaching, the prospective teacher acquires a new type of comprehension of the goals of the educational process, of the subject matter taught, of the pupils, and in general of the pedagogical mechanisms (Brodkey, 1986).

The studying framework created through the courses and the seminars enables the prospective teachers to build their foundation of pedagogical knowledge (Grimmet, & MacKinnon, 1992), to explore new ideas, to acquire and synthesize information, to formulate and resolve problem situations. To accomplish this requires the creation of special learning situations, more relevant than the simple lecture and heuristic conversation on the topic of the new pedagogical concepts acquired (Ball, & Cohen, 1996). The future teachers learn best by studying, applying, and reflecting upon that which they studied, collaborating with their colleagues, communicating the observations they make. A suitable setting for training teachers provides numerous opportunities for the research and examination of the issues, for trial and error, for discussing and evaluating the outcomes of the learning and teaching activities. The combination between theory and practice (Miller, & Silvernail, 1994) is best achieved when there are problems to be solved in a real context, during an ongoing seminar, within an environment in which the theory acquired can be implemented.

We argue that the individual studying of the prospective teachers requires a model through which reflection becomes one of the key elements, as we believe that through reflection the student assumes control over his own learning process, during each lecture or seminar. Practicing reflection during each of these will enrich their self-evaluation skills which, in turn, will help the prospective teachers to identify

their successes, as well as the inefficient procedures used by them in their learning process. During the seminars, the students' ability to apply their acquired knowledge in new contexts will be practiced, which will result in a considerable impact on their process of knowledge acquisition, in the long-term.

Therefore, the teaching staff should strive to construct, during their courses and seminars, learning situations through which the student teachers will be able to expand their theoretical knowledge, inclusively through its operationalization and redefinition in the themes and tasks suggested for their individual studying.

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