

EDU WORLD 2018
The 8th International Conference

**TEACHING PRACTICE EXPERIENCE IN DEVELOPING
LEARNING TO LEARN COMPETENCES IN PRIMARY
EDUCATION**

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Abstract

There is a transition towards competence-oriented approach in education, so training and learning towards this effect is crucial. It has an impact on the learning organization as well as on the structure of curricula. For the implementation of such education, training and learning cross-curricular approaches are required with an emphasis on teaching styles and interactive learning. It also is necessary to combine formal with non-formal learning. This is a new role for the teacher in guiding learning processes and new and modern approaches to assessment. Universities are in constant effort to adapt and organize curricula according to time and labour market requirements. In this context, they are committed to integrating consistency regarding information, education and research on learning based on competencies. This study refers curricular changes aimed at competences in the school practice and developing the learning to learn competence in a sustainable development through learning projects. In this paper, we will identify and analyse the perceptions and attitudes of student teachers towards knowledge development, skills and competences in a school project that has to do with acquiring practical skills and knowledge on both nature and sciences, promoting so ethical values, and a positive view towards sustainability and the management of student’s emotions. The findings emphasize learning to learn competence; moving towards competencies requires sustainable support for professionals and the environment in which they work; reforming the initial teacher education in order to adapt it with competence-based approaches is becoming an increasingly more important in order to ensure sustainability.

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Keywords: Learning to learn competence, teaching, initial training, student teacher.



1. Introduction

Competence-based approach is treated as an appropriate solution in reforming an education system that best suits this rapidly changing world. The adoption of the Lisbon strategy gave birth to the concept of key competence and its direct result was recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (Recommendation of the European ..., 2006).

Contemporary concepts on the learning process emphasize the active role of students in the development of new knowledge and competences. The competence-based approach tends to answer the question "What do students need to properly function in today's and tomorrow's world?" The acceleration of accumulation of information in all areas of human life is why learning to learn is of great importance nowadays. The European Commission (2007) has introduced and developed key competences for learning throughout life and learning to learn as a competency that supports all learning activities (p.3), and is viewed as a transversal competence. Techniques are being applied in schools in order to achieve this competence, but it seems that more studies are needed in this particular field. In view of this competence, we need to understand and analyse learning, learning styles and strategies of effective learning.

Learning to learn means mastering both knowledge and skills in diverse and unlimited life-style situations and outside of standard teachers operating in schools alone. Indeed, the notion of "learning to learn" involves the ability to learn continuously, even after the formal education process has come to an end. Effective learners can rely on a diverse repertoire of strategies and tools to transmit skills and knowledge through different contexts and to be able to expect and face new unpredictable solutions. It is important they are self-critical and reflective learners, and able to evaluate their progress while using hands-on strategies for obtaining and developing future useful competencies.

The school creates the conditions and opportunities necessary for the student to be educated and prepared for lifelong learning; helps children and young people cultivate curiosity and interest in knowledge and develop the competence to learn. In order to do this, the changing of the role of teachers to be more and more leaders and creators of learning situations is required (MAS, Korniza Kurrikulare e Arsimit Parauniversitar të Republikës së Shqipërisë, 2014, p. 10). Learning with the core competencies highlights the understanding and clarification of their operationalization by the teachers and students who are preparing to become teachers. We will deal with the achievement of results of leaning, the habits and approaches, the forms and methods of work for achieving this through a major project, seen from the perspective of the student who is preparing to become a teacher.

2. Problem Statement

Learning theories handle different views on learning. By understanding the learning process, we can understand learning to learn and through this we can understand the importance of setting learning goals.

Learning to learn has been defined as "ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups...in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts: at home, at work... (European Communities, 2007, p. 10). Learning by learning contributes strongly to managing a personal career.

Learning models targeting competencies, recommended by the 2014 Curriculum Framework, have their foundation for effective learning to ensure lifelong continuity, interactive teaching, partnership between actors, real or similar reality, for the recognition of nature and society (MAS, Korniza Kurrikulare e Arsimit Parauniversitar të Republikës së Shqipërisë, 2014, p. 44-45). Helle, Tynjälä, and Olkinuora, (2006), argue that project work is a collaborative form of learning. All participants in project work are required to put their input to the common outcome. It has some elements of experimental learning and puts an emphasis to active reflection rather than passive experience.

The implementation of competency-based curriculum reform requires changing the role of the teacher and the school as well as what is expected of them. Competence based teaching and learning does not develop in a "vacuum", but requires qualified teachers capable of facilitating the learning process of their pupils, is devoted to them and their needs, as well as providing them with strategies, resources and resources appropriate to make learning as effective and lasting as possible. The need to change the learning orientation that is more orientated, tailored to the needs of students, active and collaborative, dictates changes also in the preparation of the students becoming teachers. How to implement pupil education and prepare students who are becoming teachers to develop these competences in teaching in elementary education is now a point of discussion.

3. Research Questions

What are the perceptions of the students who are preparing to become teachers on the learning to learn competence during the teaching practice?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the learning to learn competence in educational activities. The findings that come from the perspective of student teachers are drawn at the end of this study..

5. Research Methods

Firstly, we revised existing research on learning and competencies. Secondly, we described the method, background of the study, and the research tools used. Thirdly, we presented the results of the research and discussed the opportunities for building the progress made to develop and further expand this potentially essential aspect of teacher pedagogy. This research has discussed four dimensions of competence: knowledge; practical skills; ethical values and attitudes. Finally, we will give some conclusions from this study and a set of key implications on the formation and development of competences for students becoming teachers in primary education.

5.1. The research backgrounds

European Communities (2007) established the framework for key competencies on learning throughout your life. It is necessary for an individual whose learning is directed towards career goals to seek knowledge of competences, skills and experiences. Stringer (2006) emphasized that we should understand the

theoretical and empirical issues of this competence and examine definitions of learning to learn, this concept that can be seen in the works of Vygotsky, Dewey, Piaget and Bruner (p. 33). Of course, an individual should recognize and understand his preferred learning strategies and the strengths and weaknesses of his / her qualifications and abilities. An individual should also be able to seek guidance and training opportunities and / or support, if any is available (European Communities, 2007, p. 8). The Curriculum Framework for Albanian Pre-University Education (MAS, Korniza Kurrikulare e Arsimit Parauniversitar të Republikës së Shqipërisë, 2014) defines learning competence through which the learner learns to learn by identifying and utilizing learning strategies and techniques; possesses properly reading, writing, math, science and ICT skills; identifies and processes information independently, effectively and responsibly; as well as learns and exchanges positive experiences in the group (p. 14). The competences and professional standards of primary education teachers are aimed at engaging the teacher in his professional development; possession of the contents of the curriculum documentation; creation of a comprehensive environment; acceptance and respect of diversity; updating the teaching methodologies; recognition and implementation of assessment methods; as well as the implementation of the Code of Ethics (IZHA, Standartet Profesionale të Formimit të Përgjithshëm dhe Lëndor të Mësuesit AF, Tiranë, 2016).

5.2. Research instrument

Qualitative research is important because its purpose is to find the deeper significance that the subject of the research contains. We want to empower participants to share their stories, to hear their voices, to understand the contexts or settings in order to explain their viewpoint and to provide information on individual experiences (Creswell, 2011).

The methodology for this research is based on qualitative analysis and was conducted through the open-ended survey. This study was based on an exploratory case study where 54 students preparing to become teachers in primary education during the period 2016-2017 were engaged.

A questionnaire was developed and applied to explore their perception of the learning to learn competence, and / or to select elements of competence.

Questionnaires were as follows:

- What is learning to learn and what structural dimensions of the learning to learn competence do you identify?
- which function (supporter, corrector, developer) does the learning to learn competence fulfil?
- What do you think are the key things a Learning to Learn pupil can do?
- What do you think are the key things a Learning to Learn teacher does?

Perceptions on teaching and competency-based approaches were taken into account in the preparation of interview planning. Knowing the research, modelling and practical organization will guide us in the design and implementation of the interview, to describe what the participants experience, feel, think, and act (Kvale, 1996).

6. Findings

The data analysis method has generated and analysed the data collected during the research. This data gives answers to the above question.

6.1. Perceptions on learning to learn and the structural dimensions of the learning to learn competence they identified

Student teachers identified the structural dimensions of the learning to learn competence: knowledge (89%), metacognitive and emotional (75%), and motivational combined with socio-cultural learning environment (71%). Aspects of 'learning process', knowledge about learning, how learning knowledge could have an impact and the explicit teaching of learning are highly rated as features of Learning to Learn. Learning is varied and purposeful, and proceeds at different rates for different people.

6.2. Perceptions on the function the learning to learn competence fulfils

The supporting function of this competence was evaluated by student teachers (78%); corrective function (67%); and developing function (21%). In this context, they emphasize the recognition of strategies that deal with processing information or problem solving. In this way they can process new information or solve new problems. Student becoming teachers that assess the developing function of learning to learn have diverse thoughts on the role of teacher and student, as well as different definition of the learning to learn process, compared to those who value learning to learn in a supportive or corrective way. Changing from a corrective or supportive view and strategy of learning to learn in a developmental function requires that the teachers change the perceptions of their assignment (Howarth, 1997). Teachers with a broad vision do not consider themselves simply as transmitters of the subject material. They view themselves as guides or coaches.

6.3. What do you think are the key things a Learning to Learn pupil can do?

We selected and grouped the responses of students becoming teachers on the pupils learning to learn based on their perceptions of competence indicators in processes; dispositions, attitudes and beliefs; and ethical values. The following table 01 presents the data collected on this aspect of the applied questionnaire. Student becoming teachers assessed the knowledge processing process, as a key element learning to learn. Pupils are able to identify current knowledge, present innovations globally, and update their knowledge. In their view, this means that they are able to discover "current" or "old" knowledge and replace this old knowledge with current knowledge.

Table 01. Key things of Learning to Learn

| Processes | N | Dispositions, Attitudes and Beliefs | N | Ethical Values | N |
|----------------------|----|-------------------------------------|----|----------------------|----|
| Knowledge processing | 53 | Motivation | 46 | Group work | 48 |
| Self evaluation | 29 | Orientation towards Change | 31 | Communication Skills | 43 |
| Problem solving | 27 | Confidence | 31 | Active participation | 41 |
| Autonomy | 23 | Reflection | 27 | Emotional abilities | 27 |
| Remembering | 18 | Enjoy learning | 24 | | |

With regard to learning to learn dispositions, attitudes and beliefs, students becoming teachers perceived increased motivation on learning to learn, orientation towards change and confidence, as the basis for learning strategies. A lower level of importance was given to reflection. Regarding ethical values,

student teachers perceived their work with others by seeking advice, information and assistance in a educational projects. This has led to an increase in communication skills and active communication between pupils with teachers and pupils with each other. Good communication skills are able to convey information among students clearly, simply, and thus gets done and understood. Students are aware of how important it is for them to be able to share with each other and this should be professional.

6.4. What do you think are the key things a Learning to Learn teacher does?

From the collected data in relation to learning to learn from the viewpoint of the teachers' competences, a few indicators were identified, referring to the teachers' professional competences, pointing to the relationship with the process of learning, the learning environment and the relationships with students. Students who are becoming teachers identified the creation of a positive and all-encompassing environment (IZHA, 2016, standard 3, p. 7) as an aspect that would enable the inclusion of all actors in learning. The process of learning alongside the pupils will influence the recognition and adaptation of the methods and strategies according to the pupils' needs. They showed different and often unclear views on how to understand learning to learn and this follows because of its implementation and development in the educational practice of elementary education.

7. Conclusion

The professional practice of students preparing for teachers is a major activity in the programs that prepare teachers and the development of the teacher's professional competences is one of its main goals. Learning on a competence basis emphasizes knowledge on the approaches to education and the ability to operationalize the competences. A clear and complex view of the learning to learn competence in higher education institutions is very important, not just for the personal academic development of the students who prepare to become teachers but also for their professional development as they will be the future teachers who will lay the foundations and apply learning to learn in schools.

When future teachers understand the concept of learning to learn and know how to apply this knowledge in practice, they can expect very positive impacts that will reflect on professional preparation and development; promoting autonomy and changes in professional practice through systematic exploration of new approaches to the classroom; motivating and increasing their ability to manage change learning to learn competences is already present in many education curricula, but teachers need more support to put them together systematically in teaching and learning processes and to promote the learning ethos.

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