THE ROLE OF THE *COMPETENCES CERTIFICATION PROGRAMME FOR THE TEACHING CAREER* OF THE FUTURE EDUCATORS

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the opinion of the student - future teachers regarding the role of the Competence certification programme for the teaching career of the future educators.

The research that we carried out involved 80 Master's students of the Faculty of Law, in the 2nd year of initial training (level I). The research methods were based on questionnaire design and administration. The opinion questionnaire was applied to all 80 subjects.

For data interpretation, we used the Pearson correlation coefficient and for their better visualization, we used tables, graphs, histograms, polygons of frequency.

As a result of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the obtained results, we were able to formulate relevant conclusions regarding the role of the teacher training programme. There were also outlined suggestions and proposals regarding the improvement of the Training Programme.

Keywords: *initial professionalization; roles; teacher development; self-valuation.*

1. Educational staff professionalization – current trends and studies

The Department of Teacher Training, as an entity at the university level, provides the initial psychological and pedagogical training of the students who choose to become teachers. This training is necessary for the optimum design and development of the instructive educational activities.

The training for the teaching career runs parallel to the students' attending the specialisation programme. At the same time, it is possible to make an option for teaching staff training at the post-graduate level.

If, in the case of other professions, we can talk about good specialists, in the case of the teaching profession, efficiency cannot only be reduced to the knowledge and the mastery of a field. A good specialist is not necessarily a good teacher. Only by the combination between the specialised competences and the teaching competences, acquired during the years of study at the university and by continuing education, a good teacher can be trained. It is well known that all these should be

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completed and optimized by the existence of some teacher qualities such as: creativity, passion, objectivity, patience, calm, compliance with principles, dignity, etc., but also adequate attitudes. "The future teacher has to acquire, by his/her initial training, not only the knowledge and skills, but also a series of attitudes required for a good practice of the teaching profession" (Ştefan, 2014a, p. 9, our translation).

In mainstream literature, "the professionalization of the teaching career, especially concerning the initial training, had an interrupted evolution, with audacious reformation measures, but also with recurrences and unforgivable delays of some measures. It is sure that the present educational policies are still inconsistent and even contradictory when referring to teacher training" (Nedelcu, Ciolan, 2010, our translation).

But in spite of all debates and contradictions, a convergent opinion can be observed concerning the necessity to evaluate the teacher's roles and responsibilities. The teacher is asked to be open to new, to be flexible and reflective, to have a critical attitude and to be practical.

Vijayan, Chakravarthi, Philips (2016) consider that in the student class the teacher's behaviour essentially influences the activity development. Therefore, the managing styles, the inter-actions mark the educational climate. There are also important aspects such as: positive encouragement and reinforcement, providing the adequate feedback and rewards, as well as clear regulations and rules.

Gould and Roffey-Barentsen (2014, pp. 4-5) describe a few important roles of a teacher, emphasizing the following categories:

- *Teaching related roles:* planning, activities projects, resources utilization; planning and organization of activities; emphasizing the activity importance; providing feedback to the students;
- *Managing roles:* report editing; recording the data and information concerning the students; implementing the measures applied in order to assure quality; maintaining relations with the parents, employers, authorities;
- *Institutional roles:* to participate in different events together with parents; to conduct different kind of inquiries; to perform some mentoring activities for the incoming students; to participate to reunions; to provide data and information concerning the students;
- *Parental roles:* a tutor for his/her students; prevention or settlement of students' discipline problems.

In Romania, as far as the field of teacher training is concerned, the teacher's personality has been subject of analysis and reflection within Romanian educational works and debates (Maciuc, 1998; Niculescu, 2002; Păun, Potolea, 2002; Iucu, Păcurari, 2001, Iucu, 2005; Mitrofan, Mitrofan, 2005; Joiţa, 2005; 2010; Cucoş, 2006).

One of the relatively recent paradigms in the field of teacher training is the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is the basis of some educational reforms in Romania. In mainstream literature, the competence-based approach goes often together with the constructivist theory of learning.

Like the cognitive one, the constructivist paradigm emphasises the student and his/her mental learning activity, in an active personalized manner, but the best implementation of constructivist theories, of their instruction spirit, depends on the teachers' professionalization level, on the implied competences - educational, teaching, managerial, self-development (Joiţa, 2006).

Constructivism promotes the teacher's reflective competence, this representing a condition for the effectiveness of the activity, for the improvement of the teaching style (Le Cornu, Peters, 2005; Mogonea, 2015).

Thus, the reflective teacher develops the reflective attitude of his/her students, explicitly stimulates the meta-cognitive processes and competences, creates opportunities to implement reflection in the classroom, uses and encourages the responsible interactive style (Le Cornu, Peters, 2005).

According to the constructivist paradigm principles concerning education, Harden and Crosby (2000) establish the teacher's 12 roles. In spite of the fact that this exemplification is made in relation to the medical field, we consider that these roles are relevant for any field.

- Information supplier: lecturer, practice trainer;
- Model to follow: model at his/her working place; model as a teacher ;
- Help: mentor; a help for the learning activity;
- Evaluator: evaluator of the student; evaluator of the curriculum;
- Project manager: of the curriculum; of activities;
- Resource creator: creator of material resources; creator of learning guides.

The educational personality and the profile of his/her competences are permanently questioned, they need to be adapted to the context, to the specific social environment. The professional skills development represents a continuous process (…). This process of ongoing knowledge acquisition, structuring and restructuring, represents, in fact, the professionalization process for the teaching career, which is starts during the initial training stages and goes on during the years of the teaching career, by the integration of the direct professional experience but also by the specific continuing education actions (Ştefan, 2008, p. 23).

Starting from this basic idea, we consider that several questions need to get answers: How can the teaching staff be adequately trained in order to be able to perform more and more complex professional roles and functions? Which is the role of the *"Competences certification programme for the teaching career?"* for the future educators?

2. Investigation framework

2.1. Goals
The present study aims at:
The role of the *"Competences certification programme for the teaching career"* for the future educators.

2.2. The group sample and investigation methods

The group sample included 80 students enrolled in the Master's programme at the Faculty of Law; they were in the second year of their initial teacher training (level I) course within the Department of Teacher Training at the University of Craiova.

The methods used for data collection were the questionnaire and the focus group interview.

The questionnaire addressing the 80 subjects contains 12 open and closed items. Some of the items have been drawn up using the Lickert scale, the students being asked to place their opinion on an imaginary scale, marked from 1 to 5 (the significance of the items was "not at all", "to a very small extent", "to a small extent", "to a large extent") or from 1 to 4 ("weak", "medium", "good", "very good").

In order to emphasize the students' less enthusiastic attitude concerning the above mentioned aspects, as well as to avoid some non-answers, we considered necessary to introduce two other steps on that scale: "I don't know/ I cannot appreciate" and "No comment".

As for structure, the questionnaire aims to clarify the following: Self-evaluation of the teaching abilities, of the personality features, of the roles underpinning the teaching behaviour, after the students attended the *"Competences certification programme for the teaching career"* .
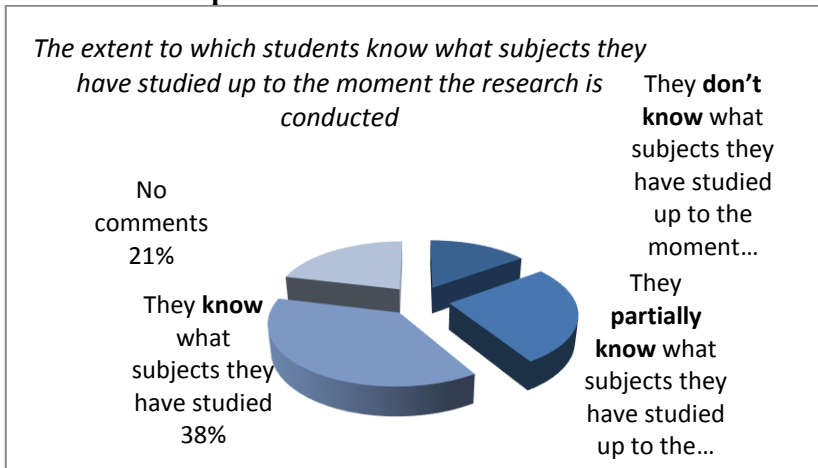
The first two questions have the following goal: to identify the extent to which the students are aware of the benefits deriving from successfully completing the teacher training module.

2.3. Selective analysis, processing and interpretation of data

The recorded data obtained from the questionnaire showed that most of the students fully (37.50 %) or partially (26.25%) know which are the subjects included in the teacher training curriculum. From the total number of participants, 15% know nothing about these subjects and 21.25% did not answer this question. The results are shown in table 1 and are represented in figure 1.

Table no. 1. The extent to which the students know what subjects they have studied up to the moment the research is conducted

Results	Frequency	Percentage
They **don't know** what subjects they have studied up to the moment the research is conducted	12	15
They **partially know** what subjects they have studied up to the moment the research is conducted	21	26.25
They **know** what subjects they have studied	30	37.50
No comments	17	21.25
Total	80	100.0

Figure no. 1. The extent to which the students know what subjects they have studied up to the moment the research is conducted

When asked the question – Which one of the subjects you studied was the most interesting to you? – most of the students (64%) considered that the T*eaching practice* was the most attractive and formative within the *"Competences certification programme for the teaching career", "class management"* was ranked the second (22%) and the *"Psychology of education"* the third.

As it can be seen from these results, the students appreciate the subjects that involve the application of the theoretical knowledge to practice, they are concerned with their teacher training, but also by the psychological aspects of the teaching activity, by their personal growth and by the psychological perspective on the educational process.

The teaching practice is placed, in the subjects' opinion, at the core of the professional competences development: it "allows to apply the main knowledge, develop the abilities and attitudes the future teachers will need".
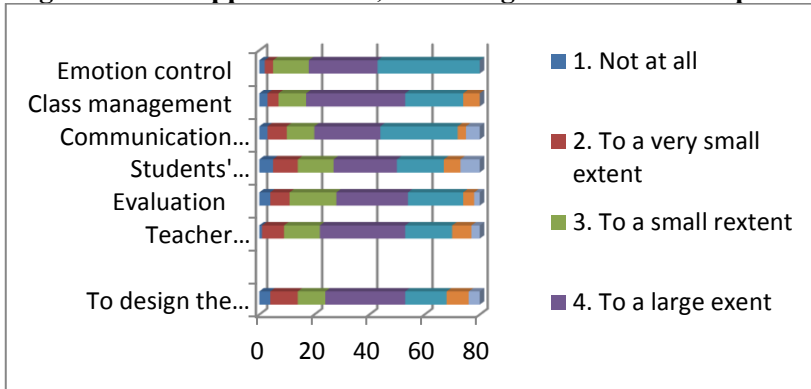
The need for support the students have is represented in the following (Table 2; Figure 2):

Table no. 2. Support needed, according to the students' opinion

Dimension	1. Not at all	2. To a very small extent	3. To a small rextent	4. To a large exent	5. To a very large extent	6. I don't know/I cannot appreciate	7. No comment
To design the teaching activities	4	10	10	29	15	8	4
Teacher development	1	8	13	31	17	7	3
Evaluation	4	7	17	26	20	4	2

Students' involvement	5	9	13	23	17	6	7
Communication skills	3	7	10	24	28	3	5
Class management	3	4	10	36	21	6	0
Emotion control	2	3	13	25	37	0	0

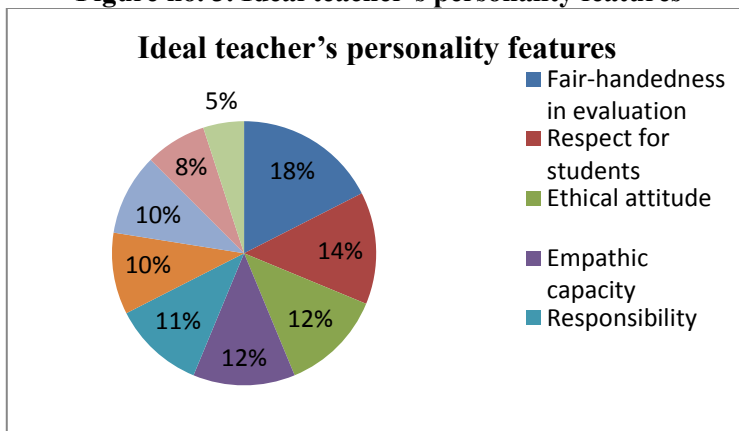**Figure no. 2. Support needed, according to the students' opinion**

As indicated by the data, most students consider they need support and advice "to a large extent", "to a very large extent" for all the aspects involved.

Item 5 requires the students to mention 10 personality features they think to be necessary for the ideal teacher profile. In the following graphic representations (Fig. 3), we shall display the classification of the 10 most appreciated personality features, as resulting from data interpretation:

Table no. 3. Ideal teacher's personality features

No	Ideal teacher's personality features	Frequency	Percentage
1	Fair-handedness in evaluation	13	17,50
2	Respect for students	12	13,75
3	Ethical attitude	10	12,50
4	Empathic capacity	9	12,50
5	Responsibility	9	11,25
6	Emotion management	7	10
7	Lifelong learning	6	10
8	Adaptability	5	7,50
9	Punctuality	5	5

Figure no. 3. Ideal teacher's personality features

Among the above mentioned personality features, the students had to select 3 features they consider to have developed to a large extent, after successfully completing the teacher training programme.

The results were as follows: 1. Fair-handedness in evaluation − 13 subjects (17.50%); 2. Respect for students − 12 subjects (13.75%); 3. Ethical attitude − 10 subjects (12.50%).
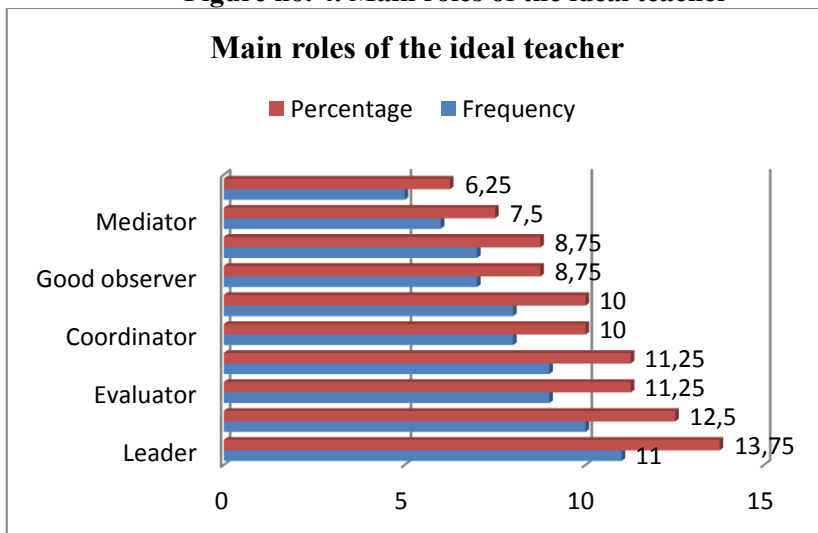
Among the skills required for a teacher, the subjects mentioned as the best developed within the teacher training programme, the following:

1. Communication skills – 36 subjects (45%);
2. Lifelong learning – 24 subjects (30%);
3. Lesson planning – 20 subjects (25%).

The ideal teacher, as featured by this research sample students, performs the following roles (Table 4, Figure 4):

Table no. 4. Main roles of the ideal teacher

No.	Main roles of the ideal teacher	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Leader	11	13,75
2.	Trainer, mentor	10	12,50
3.	Evaluator	9	11,25
4.	Adviser	9	11,25
5.	Coordinator	8	10
6.	Organizer	8	10
7.	Good observer	7	8,75
8.	Motivation factor	7	8,75
9.	Mediator	6	7,50
10.	Informant	5	6,25

Figure no. 4. Main roles of the ideal teacher

As far as the perception of their own competences is concerned, we can see that almost half of the number of the sample students (48.50%) appreciate as sufficient their pre-service teacher training, and they feel equipped for problem solving situations.

The answers to the question – *"How do you evaluate your level of teacher competences development?"* – run as follows: Low – 26.50%; Medium – 20%; High – 26.25%;Very good – 22.25%; No comment – 5%.

A relatively large percentage (46.50%) of the subjects of our investigation have a negative perception of the competences acquired along the years of study, and they rank as *low* or *medium* their teacher competences level development.

In spite of this negative perception, more than half of the subjects want to pursue a teaching career. The last question of the questionnaire – *"Do you wish to follow a teaching career?"* – triggered an affirmative answer with 43 subjects (53.75%), a negative answer with 27 subjects (33.75%), whereas 10 subjects (12.50%) provided no answer.

Among the reasons given by those who want to become teachers, the following were mentioned:
- The possibility to work in a stimulating environment, with students of different ages;
- It is a honourable profession, involving training of the young people, resulting in satisfaction and joy, based on lifelong learning, self-training and cognitive effort;
- Flexible schedule, "students' holidays also represent teacher's holidays".

The students who do not want to become teachers sustain their opinion by the following arguments:
- Low wages in spite of the large amount of work and effort;
- A lot of patience and love for children;
- Permanent adaptation to changes;
- Lifelong learning, "information updating";
- Too much pressure, the necessity to be a model for the students and other teachers.

In order to have full picture of the situation, we also investigated the relationship between the variables measured within this study (self-evaluation of the teacher training) and other variables, such as: age, course attendance, etc. Next, we shall present the statistically significant results.

- *Analysis of the correlation between the investigated items and age*

In order to identify the relation between the age of the students participating in the study and the investigated items, the Bravais-Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated. In Table 5 the statistically significant coefficients are presented, showing that there is a relation between the age and some items of the questionnaire the students had to answer.

Table no. 5. Factors showing the correlation between age and the questionnaire items

Age		I4.1	I4.2	I4.3	I4.4	I4.5	I4.6	I4.7
	r	.240	.354	.264	-.167	-.139	.280	.130
	P	.000	.000	.000	.006	.037	.000	.033
	N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80

When analyzing the results, we find that there is a significantly positive correlation between age and the required capacities for the teaching activity, between age and aspects connected to class management (I4.6) or emotion control (I4.7). Thus, the older the students are, the higher they score for these items.

A negative correlation was observed between age and self-evaluation concerning the teaching capacities (I3). In other words, the older the students are, the smaller ($r= -0,419$ la $p<.01$) the extent the subjects consider they have accomplished their teacher training, the subjects being more aware of the necessity of the continuing education.

- *Analysis of the correlation between the investigated items and course attendance*

Another investigated aspect concerns the differences between the variables measured according to high course attendance or occasional participation in the training courses. Table 6 shows the corresponding results:

Table no. 6. Factors of correlation between course attendance and the global index of the investigated items

		Knowledge of the teacher training subject matter	Perception of their teacher training	Self-evaluation of the teaching abilities	Self-evaluation of personality features
High course attendance		.348	.220	.179	.186
		.000	.050	.000	.002
Occasional participation		.265	.158	.149	.120
		.000	.010	.015	.050

The investigated subjects considering that the course requires compulsory attendance scored higher than the subjects favouring occasional participation with respect to:
- Knowledge of the teacher training subject matter (I1);
- Perception of their teacher training (I3);
- Self-evaluation of their own capacities of planning, implementing and evaluation of the teaching activities (I4.1, I4.2, I4.3, I10);
- Self-evaluation of personality characteristics (I6).

Conclusions

We aimed at providing a synthesis of the data that were collected and interpreted, with regard to the initial training process of pre-service teachers, and we managed to reach the following conclusions:
- The subjects are concerned with field-related training and teacher teaching alike, they attach importance to aspects concerning the planning, implementation and evaluation of a teaching activity, by aspects concerning awareness of the psycho-pedagogical profile of the students, by developing adequate strategies to communicate and to cooperate with students, by their personal growth, etc.;
- Among the 5 most appreciated teacher's qualities, as resulting from data processing, fair-handedness in evaluation, respect for students, ethical attitude, empathic capacity, responsibility come topmost;
- Most of the students appreciate they need assistance, advice, "to a large extent", "to a very large extent" for all the investigated areas, ranging from the lesson planning to lesson implementation and evaluation, from class management to self-management; among the competences identified as part of the ideal teacher profile *the lifelong learning competence* being considered the second of the most developed competences within the *teacher training programme*; the subjects need to be monitored, assisted during the self-learning process so that they become aware of the self-management competence complexity, as this is an aggregate notion;

- Lesson planning is ranked the third among the most developed competences within the *teacher training programme*;
- As for the perception of their own competences, only 48.50% of the student sample appreciate themselves as having a sufficient *teacher training*, so that they are able to solve difficult situations; a significant percentage (46.50%) of the investigated subjects have a negative perception of the acquired competences. Is it an objective appreciation or is it just low self-confidence? In order to find the answer to this question, the answers given by the subjects should be correlated with the results obtained at some tests;
- Many students show a deep concern for their personal growth, self-analysis and upgrading; but a lack of confidence in their own capacities was also observed; as the self-evaluation of their own competences is one of the most motivating factors for the students, we have to insist on the meta-cognitive development so that the students will be able to self-assess, to identify their weaknesses as well as the hindrances in their training process; on the other hand, there is need to emphasise their strengths and the strategies used to overcome barriers and make progress.

We may conclude that the majority of the students of the research sample (53.75%), in spite of all disadvantages and challenges they face, are determined to pursue a teaching career and become professionals.

Efficient intervention is needed with respect to all of the above mentioned aspects (theoretical, but also practical, cognitive, but also non-cognitive factors), in order to enhance the overall improvement of the initial training of the student – future teacher. Recent research, aiming to develop the competences required by the teaching profession, has pointed out to the fact that the cognitive factors are not sufficient for professional success; the meta-cognitive, affective and motivational factors having the same importance in the educational process, in achieving the flexibility allowing for the transition from knowledge to the practical application of the abilities in different teaching contexts (Ștefan, 2014b, p. 63).

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