

THE TEACHER'S COMPETENCE PROFILE IN THE CONTEXT OF PRE-SERVICE PROFESSIONALISATION

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Abstract

According to the competence paradigm, identified both in theory and educational practice, the teachers' pre-service professionalisation should be achieved from the perspective of training and practising essential competences and roles associated with an effective teacher who must be able to deal with all educational and class management aspects. The present study aims to investigate the opinion of the students/pre-service teachers on the teacher's ideal profile in the context of the current Romanian pre-university education.

The research we initiated included 80 2nd year Master's students of the Faculty of Letters, enrolled in the Teacher Training Programme (Level 2). The research methods used were the survey based on the questionnaire, and the focus group interview. The questionnaire was applied to all 80 subjects, but the interview was conducted with only on 20 people, out of the 80. For the interpretation of the results, we used tables, charts, histograms.

As a result of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results, we formulated relevant conclusions about the teacher's profile.

Key words: *Competence paradigm, Competence profile, Management paradigm, Teacher's pre-service professionalisation.*

1. Introduction. Dimensions of the teacher's competence profile

In the mainstream literature, the term *competence* has received numerous interpretations, the attempts to define it are numerous and not very precise; most of these definitions do not clarify the differences between this concept and others that are part of the same notional sphere (such as *skill, ability*), or they replace the term *competence* with *ability* and vice versa (Mogonea, 2014a). Illustrative in this sense are some of the following definitions:

- it also presupposes knowledge that, according to Perrenoud, can be: declarative, procedural, conditional (Perrenoud, 2001), abilities, capacities, attitudes, experiences of the learner, aggregated in structures aimed at achieving high performance in a certain activity or field;

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- it is identified as a set/sets; mastery of competence involving the ability to relate a concrete situation to a category of situations, to integrate it and to interpret it as such (Ionescu, 2003 - our translation);

- to a certain extent, pedagogical competence is identified with pedagogical aptitude but, unlike skill, competence has a larger coverage, including the results of the activity, besides the knowledge and ability to perform correctly (Stănciulescu, 2006, p. 397 - our translation).

For a clearer terminological delineation, some features of *competence* can be outlined (Ștefan, 2014a, p. 21 - our translation):

- *it is integrative*: competence means the integration of knowledge, skills, abilities, and diverse attitudes;

- *it represents the outcome, the end of the training cycle*: competence requires sufficient, relevant and organised knowledge, associated with abilities, capacities and integrated to situational models. Thus, developing competence requires undertaking a course/training period;

- *it involves the (blended) implementation* of different knowledge, abilities, capacities a person has at a given moment in a specific context.

- *it is a construction or reconstruction system*; it evolves and it can be lost if it is not activated for a long time.

The competence paradigm meets the developments of cognitive psychology research, according to which, by competence, the transfer and activation of knowledge and skills in new and dynamic situations/contexts are achieved. In general, competence involves "the activation of resources, mainly cognitive ones, for explaining, analyzing, solving a complex, practical situation, but also other internal resources of the personality (Perrenoud, Roegiers, De Ketele quoted in Joița, 2010, pp. 58 - our translation) underpins *transferability* because it is not limited to results or performance, but must generate a diversity of performance in a variety of contexts.

Liakopoulou (2011) considers that the teacher's profile should integrate:

- subject knowledge;
- knowledge of learners;
- teaching methodology;
- school curriculum knowledge, curriculum design, implementation and evaluation skills;
- general pedagogical knowledge;
- knowledge of contexts so as to capitalise on educational contexts;
- knowledge of "self".

Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, Major (2014) lists six components that feature a good teacher: pedagogical content knowledge; quality of instruction; classroom climate; class management; teacher beliefs; professional behaviours.

After having conducted several interviews with several teachers, McBer (2000, quoted in Liakopoulou, 2011, p. 67) established 16 professional characteristics (including personality traits and attitudes) that can be grouped into 5 categories:

- professionalism: commitment, trustworthiness, respect;
- thinking: analytical and conceptual thinking;
- expectations: disposal of achievement of high objectives, disposal for permanent comprehension of reality;
- leadership: flexibility, accountability, pleasure for learning;
- relations with others: fertile interaction in the educational process, skills of common work, comprehension.

An essential dimension of the teacher's competence profile is the managerial component. Currently, the management paradigm is competing separately from leadership (Joița, 2009, 2010 - our translation).

To manage the different educational situations that a classroom provides, the teacher must possess an array of managerial skills. Research has resulted in lists and classifications of such skills (Joița, 2000; Mogonea, 2009; Mogonea, 2014b) or analyses of some of these competences, such as decision-making (Mogonea, Popescu, 2015).

In line with technology advancement, the evolution of society, teachers' competences must be the ones that will ensure success in the classroom, which can often take the form of a virtual class (Mogonea, 2014c). Admittedly, the training of prospective teachers working in an educational environment can be achieved not only in the classical version but also through e-learning or blended learning (Brenton, 2009; Isman, Abanmy, Hussein, Al Saadany, 2012).

Moreover, the use of e-learning technologies and ICT reconsiders the learning process, studies proposing a European e-competences profile.

A profile of e-competences as outlined in the mainstream literature (Stalmeier, 2006) could include the following eight fundamental categories, each involving a number of specific competencies: instructional design skills, instructional skills, communication skills, skills to use different programs and applications, management and organisational skills, information mining skills, support skills.

More recent studies (Falch, Mang, 2015) highlight the importance of students' ICT skills and non-cognitive skills for and in the classroom.

In this climate of opinion, we pose a few key questions about the teacher's competence profile: What skills should a teacher possess in a dynamic changing society? What should teachers know (*savoir dire*) and what should they do (*savoir faire*)? To what extent can the teacher's roles be used so that he/she can adapt his/her teaching to the needs and possibilities of each student?

These questions, which can open up the way for others, are the starting point of our investigative approach.

2. Investigative approach

2.1. Objectives

The constative research that we conducted had as **main objective** to investigate the opinion of the pre-service teachers on the profile of the teacher.

To this end, we considered some specific objectives:

- to shape the "ideal" teacher profile from the perspective of personality traits;
- to establish the hierarchy of the teacher's competences based on their importance and frequency of their exploitation in the teaching activity;
- to identify the teacher's basic responsibilities according to the roles he/she has to play in the classroom or outside;
- to exercise the self-evaluation competence of the pre-service teachers by identifying the level reached in the development of teaching competences and exercising the teacher-specific roles.

2.2. Research sample and methods

In order to carry out our investigation, we selected a sample of subjects composed of 80 2nd year Master's students of the Faculty of Letters, University of Craiova, enrolled in the Teacher Training Programme, Level 2.

The research methods we applied were the survey questionnaire and the focus-group interview, which were accompanied by the appropriate tools.

The questionnaire applied to the Master's students comprised 10 different items, closed (most of them) and open-ended ones.

From the point of view of the structure of the questionnaire, we mention that some items use the Lickert scale, students being asked to express their opinion on an abstract rating scale, with numerical values ranging from 1 to 5 (the lexical significance attributed to the items being "Not at all", "To a very small extent", "To a large extent", "To a very large extent") or from 1 to 4 ("Poor", "Satisfactory", "Good", "Very good"). These two variants of answers were supplemented by two others: "Do not know/I cannot appreciate", "I don't want to answer" to capture the students' hesitations or refusal.

In terms of content, the questionnaire aimed to outline the profile of the ideal teacher from the perspective of pre-service teachers.

The first two questions have the role of "breaking the ice" between the subjects and the interviewer, and of securing the transition to the questions regarding the drawing up of a "portrait" of the effective/in effective teacher.

The other questions in the questionnaire asked for the opinion of the subjects on the personality traits of the "ideal" teacher (item 3), on the competences required for a successful teacher (items 4 and 5), the roles the teacher exercises in the classroom (item 7). Items 6 and 8 asked the subjects to carry out a self-assessment of the level of development of these competences by virtue of attending the teacher training programme and of the opportunities provided by the courses within this programme to practise their roles as hierarchised by them.

The last questions of the questionnaire called for the creative, proactive thinking skills of the subjects, asking them to formulate proposals for optimising the Teacher Training Programme.

Another way of collecting the data that we used was the focus group, meant to identify the perception of the students who participated in the educational activities within the Teacher Training Programme delivered by Department of

Teacher Training, University of Craiova, to detect the attitudes, emotions and spontaneous reactions of the participants.

The tool used to build the focus groups was *the interview guide*. In the interview guide, questions are logically ordered, starting from more general questions and continuing with specific, detailed questions.

The interview guide contains 7 questions, as follows:

- an opening question to create a tensefree, trustworthy atmosphere between the subjects and the interviewer;
- a transition question aimed at directing the discussion to the questions regarding the drawing up of a "portrait" of the effective/ineffective teacher;
- four key questions concerning the teaching activities in Teacher Training Programme, with emphasis on the difficulties encountered during these activities, suggestions, proposals for organising and conducting courses and seminars in the future;
- a closing question meant to highlight issues that were not addressed by the previous questions.

3. Results and data interpretation

In what follows, we shall present selectively the answers provided to the items of the questionnaire by the interviewed subjects, allowing to outline the profile of the teacher's competence profile.

Thus, one of the items in the questionnaire asked the subjects to identify 10 personality traits that they would find essential for what they consider to be the ideal teacher. Following the answers of the subjects, I was able to decide on a ranking of the first 10 personality traits, as indicated in Table 1 and Chart 1.

Table no. 1. Personality traits relevant for the "ideal" teacher

No.	Ideal teacher's personality traits	Frequency	Percentage
1	Professionalism	13	16.25
2	Pedagogical tact	12	15
3	Respect for students	10	12.50
4	Patience, calm	9	11.25
5	Empathy, understanding	9	11.25
6	Responsibility	7	8.75
7	Fair handedness, objectivity	6	7.50
8	Flexibility	5	6.25
9	Seriousness	5	6.25

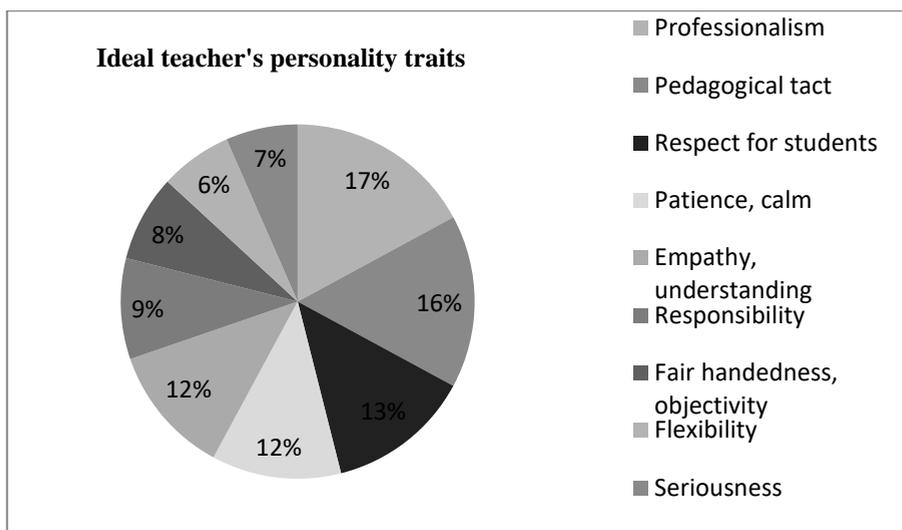


Chart no. 1. Ideal teacher's personality traits

Another item in the questionnaire asked the Master's students to identify 10 competences they would include in the teacher's profile. We show the most appreciated 10 skills in Table 2 and Chart 2, as a result of data processing:

Table no. 2. Ideal teacher's competences

Ideal teacher's competences	Frequency	Percentage
Class management competence	13	25
Lifelong learning competence	10	50
Communicative competence	10	50
Evaluation competence	10	50
Digital competence	8	10
Lesson planning competence	7	5
Raising student motivation competence	7	5
Research competence	6	0
Social competence	6	0
School-family-community management competence	3	5
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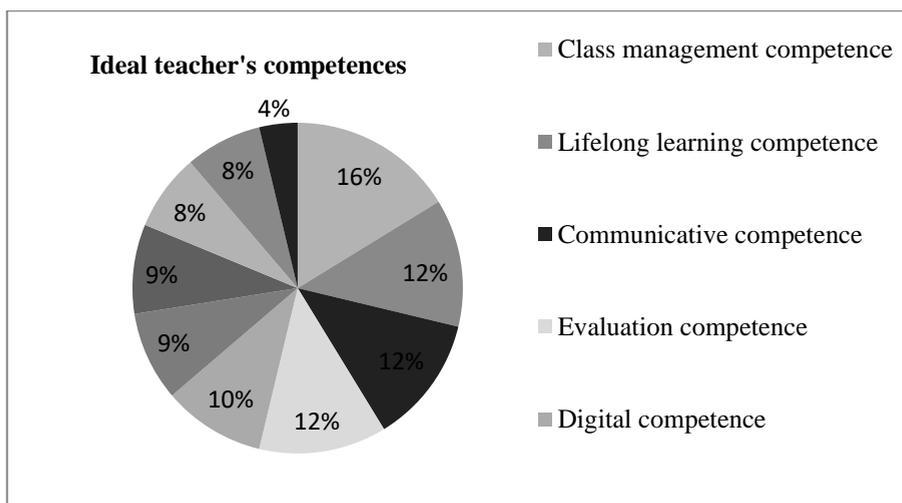


Chart no. 2. Ideal teacher's main competences

Regarding the extent to which the competences hierarchised by the interviewed subjects can ensure the success of the teacher in the classroom, and help him/her effectively manage the numerous and varied training or classroom situations encountered, the results of the answers provided by the Master's students are presented in Table 3 and Chart 3.

Table no. 3. Subjects' opinion on the extent to which the teacher's competences enable him/her to manage the various classroom situations

Aspects	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Not at all (%)	To a very small extent (%)	To a small extent (%)	To a large extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)	Don't know/ I cannot appreciate (%)	I don't want to answer (%)
1 Management of teaching activities	3.75	13.75	11.25	37.5	16.25	10	7.5
2 Solving out conflicts	3.75	10	30	25	21.25	6.25	3.75
3 Collaboration, efficient classroom communication	5	8.75	25	28.75	25	5	2.5
4 Adjustment of the teaching process to the individual learners' specific needs	10	12,5	26.25	18.75	15	7,5	10

5	Adequate collaboration with family and other partner institutions	11.25	13.75	18.75	17.5	13.75	8.75	16.25
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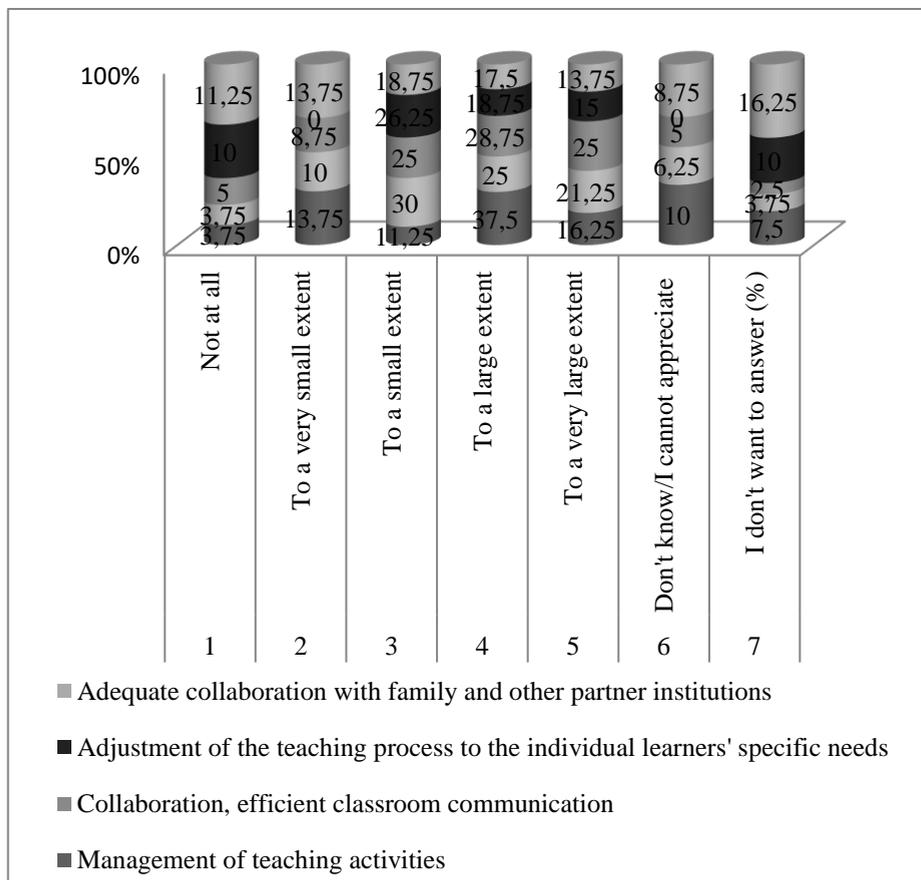


Chart no. 3. Subjects' opinion on the extent to which the teacher's competences enable him/her to manage the various classroom situations

As seen from the previous graphic representations, pre-service teachers believe that by exercising the above mentioned competences, the teacher successfully manages the class to a great extent, but he/she fails to adapt his/her teaching to the specific needs of each student; he/she communicates effectively in the classroom, and, to a lesser extent, he/she fails to resolve conflicts, while difficulties also arise in working with the family or other institutions involved.

As far as the roles that the teacher has to exercise in the classroom are concerned, the subjects made a hierarchy of them in terms of their importance, according to the frequency with which they manifest.

The results obtained following the centralisation of the subjects' answers are shown in Table 4 and Chart 4, respectively:

Table no. 4. Subjects' opinion on the importance of the roles exercised by the teacher

No.	Main roles of the ideal teacher	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Information provider	11	13.75
2.	Counsellor	10	12.50
3.	Assessor	9	11.25
4.	Motivator	9	11.25
5.	Organiser	8	10
6.	Facilitator, providing student support	8	10
7.	Role model, setting an example	7	8.75
8.	Resource manager	7	8.75
9.	Decision maker	6	7.50
10.	Designer, developer, planner	5	6.25

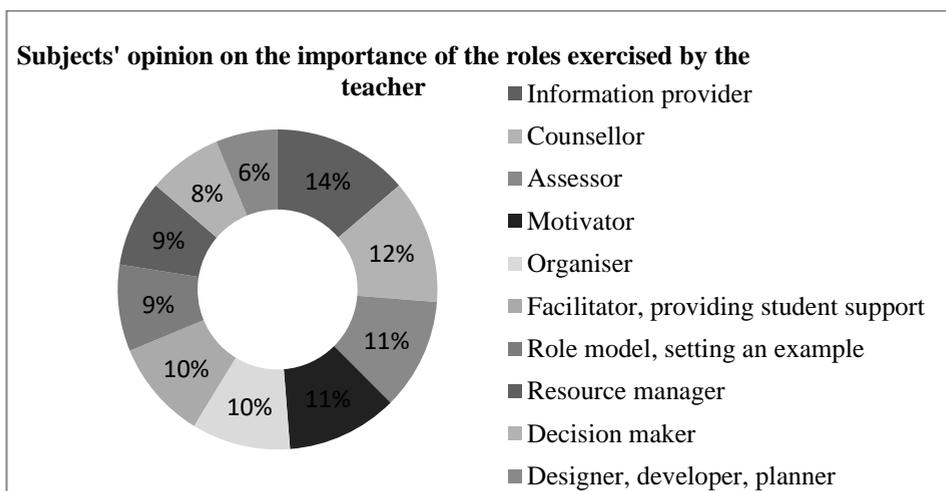


Chart no. 4. Subjects' opinion on the importance of the roles exercised by the teacher

The highest ranking roles in the view of the subjects are those of information provider, counsellor, assessor and motivator, although, as seen, the differences between them and the other roles are not significant.

Regarding the self-evaluation carried out by the target pre-service teachers, most of them (28.75%) considered that the Teacher Training Programme had largely succeeded in developing the competences needed by a teacher, but it gave the the

opportunity to exercise the teacher's roles to a small extent (30%) (Tables 5-6 and Charts 5-6).

Table no. 5. Subjects' opinion on the level of development of competences within the pre-service Teacher Training programme

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To what extent do you think you have developed teacher's competences within the teacher training programme?	Not at all (%)	To a very small extent (%)	To a small extent (%)	To a large extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)	Don't know / I cannot appreciate (%)	I don't want to answer (%)
	6.25	8.75	20	28.75	13.75	13.75	8.75

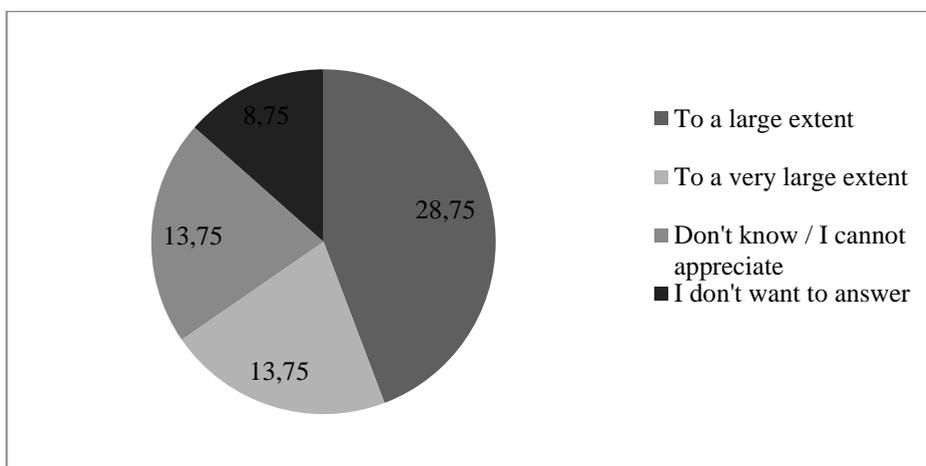


Chart no. 5. Subjects' opinion on the level of development of competences within the pre-service Teacher Training programme

Table no. 6. Master's students opinion on the opportunities to exercise teacher's roles during the teacher training courses

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To what extent do you think you were given opportunities to exercise teacher's roles during the teacher training courses?	Not at all (%)	To a very small extent (%)	To a small extent (%)	To a large extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)	Don't know / I cannot appreciate (%)	I don't want to answer (%)
	11.25	16.25	30	10	8.75	10	13.75

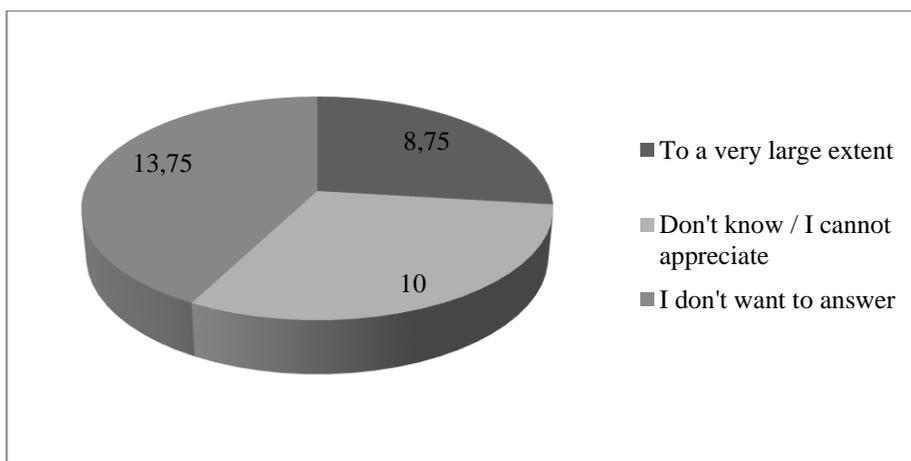


Chart no. 6. Master's students opinion on the opportunities to exercise teacher's roles during the teacher training courses

The last items of the questionnaire offered the students the opportunity to formulate proposals to enhance the training and development of teacher's competences. Firstly, they mentioned the need for more weight of the teaching practice in the the pre-service training programme, followed by the multiplication of the possibilities of ensuring a closer connection between theory and practice; providing a wider framework of activities, also in non-formal environments, not only in formal ones; diversification of contexts, types of classrooms, students and teachers so that trainees would have the opportunity to know and adapt their teaching style to the context.

The analysis of the answers provided by the students interviewed within the focus group reveals several directions in relation to their perception of the teaching profession.

In the students' view, the characteristics of an effective/ineffective teacher may be summarised as follows (Table 7):

Table 7. Characteristics of an effective/ineffective teacher, according to the students

Characteristics of an effective teacher	Characteristics of an ineffective teacher
Good subject matter knowledge	Poor subject matter knowledge
Good teaching methodology knowledge	Poor teaching methodology knowledge
Openness to innovation and change	Routine-driven, no openness to change
Love for children	Lack of patience and love for children
Outgoing	Reserved
Calm, patient	Uncooperative, stressed
Respect for students	Inadequate language and behaviour
Empathetic to students	Distant

Based on the analysis of the answers, we note that the subjects are aware of the importance of good training, both from the perspective of subject matter and teaching methodology. Also, the effectiveness of the teacher depends on the presence/lack of pedagogical skills.

Regarding the expectations from the teaching activities they participated in, the answers of the participants in the focus group are placed on the following directions:

- acquisition of knowledge, of theoretical aspects in the field of psycho-pedagogy;
- development of practical skills, with respect to the planning, design, organisation, implementation and evaluation of teaching activities, as well as concerning knowledge of learners and identification of strategies for communication and collaboration with them;
- awareness of different teaching styles through the examples offered by their university teachers within the Teacher Training programme (observational learning);
- development of appropriate attitudes, personal growth-orientation, emphasizing aspects of managing emotions, overcoming timidity and gaining self-confidence, issues related to class management, the ability to raise motivation, to direct learners' attention, to interact effectively with them.

Among the shortcomings mentioned by the respondents, most of them are related to the teacher's personality and teaching style:

- empathic failure with students (13.75%);
- teacher-student barrier (15%);
- abstract, rigid language, inappropriate discursive structure (16.25);
- high volume of information (18.75%);
- insufficient stimulation of responsible, active student involvement to facilitate assertiveness (22.50%);
- insufficient stimulation and maintenance of interactions (13.75%).

4. Discussions

In an attempt to best summarise the collected and interpreted data about the dimensions of the teacher's personality, required to successfully manage any educational situations that may be encountered in or out of the classroom, which also need and can be practised within the Pre-Service Teacher Training programme, we list the following:

- the top-ranking teacher's important personality traits, as indicated by the Master's students' answers, would include: professionalism, pedagogical tact, respect for pupils, patience and empathy;
- among the most valued 5 competences identified by the sample subjects are: leadership, the lifelong learning, communicative competence, evaluation competence, digital competence. Lesson planning is placed on the 6th position in the

teacher's profile, although the subjects rank it the 3rd among the most developed competences in the *Pre-Service Teacher Training programme*;

- students' views on the extent to which the competences exercised within the programme can be useful in class management are divided, considering that they do not fully prove their effectiveness in solving atypical or less common situations, such as the ones related to solving a conflict, achieving effective communication with the family, especially in tense situations, observing the principle of adjusting the school environment to the student and not vice versa;

- the teacher, according to the sample students, has to mainly exercise the following roles: information provider, counsellor, assessor and motivator. It is noteworthy that most of the students are aware of the major role of education in the evolution of the contemporary society, because during the training courses the trainers insisted on the teacher's lines of action, on his/her mission in youth development;

- students feel the need to highlight the applied, formative aspects of training, the numerous and various contexts in which to exercise such competences.

5. Conclusions

The teacher's personality and competence profile are permanently questioned, they must be continuously adapted to the context, to the specific social environment. Developing professional competence is a permanent process (...). This process of acquisition, structuring and ongoing restructuring is in fact the professionalisation process of the teaching career, which begins in the pre- and in-service training stages over the years, through the integration of direct professional experiences and through the specific training actions. (Ștefan, 2008, p. 23 - our translation).

Therefore, the efforts of the specialists must converge in order to secure the premises for the solid theoretical and practical training of the prospective teachers that will allow them to adapt to the school context and to successfully solve the various problems they will face in the classroom. "The prospective teacher must acquire not only knowledge and skills, but also a set of attitudes necessary for adequately practising the teaching profession" (Ștefan 2014b, p. 9 - our translation)

Since they are developed in the pre-service professionalisation programme, the pedagogical and teaching skills are furthered throughout the professional career. Beyond participating in various training courses, there are many other career development opportunities. Broad and Evans (2006, pp. 14-16) point out some ways in this respect:

- collective learning, conducted in different groups, where teachers have the opportunity to exchange ideas, practices, experiences;
- peer-assisted learning - especially in the case of new colleagues, novices;
- the teacher as a researcher/practitioner, the teacher having the opportunity to conduct research - an action that contributes both to the improvement of the educational practice and of his/her teaching style.

- the teacher as a learner, by participating in academic programmes that allow him/her to complete his/her studies or obtain new specialisations or qualifications;
- independent learning that provides good control over his/her own learning activities by using a problem-solving framework;
- integrated approaches to different aspects of professional development.

In today's society, the individual is forced to adapt quickly and efficiently. Schools seek to develop personalities capable of undertaking the responsibility for acquiring competences. Training methodologies should prepare the learner to become a competent person, a good organiser of learning experiences.

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