

Chapter III

**DISCREPANCY OR COHESION BETWEEN EXPECTED
AND ACHIEVED RESULTS**

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Abstract: The basic idea behind all educational reforms in Serbia in the past was based on a tendency to be compatible with the European educational system or to somehow come closer to it. These reforms were mostly only partial, focused on corrections and changes in the direction of improving certain segments of the educational system (plans, programs, textbooks, and extension of education) so that the expected results were not in fact achieved. Taking into account that the teacher is a key player in an educational reform process (because he/she educates those who will educate future generations), the education policy makers in 2012 formed a *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia until 2020*, which included, besides other things, measures, proposals and solutions to improve teacher education. The aim of the paper was to use the comparative and theoretical analysis method in order to determine whether there is discrepancy or cohesion between the competences expected of teachers in the 21st century and those that future teachers acquire at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, University of Kragujevac. By comparing the study programs of the final years of basic academic studies of students – future class teachers and the *Regulations and standards of competencies for the teacher profession* (primarily class teachers), we have come to the conclusion that the elements that were the subject of our analysis are not sufficiently coherent, mutually unrelated and incompatible. On the basis of the results of our research, we propose that a reform of the study programs of compulsory subjects (primarily the teaching methodologies) should be carried out during the next accreditation period. The research will outline some amendments that could be introduced and will enable future teachers to attain the highest standards of competencies and, in all teaching areas, better qualify for their profession.

Keywords: *competencies for the profession of teachers, students – future teachers, study programs.*

Introduction

Educational reform in our country started in 2003, when Serbia joined the Bologna Process. Within this context, two documents are important for our paper – *Regulations and Standards of Competencies for the Teaching Profession* (hereinafter *Regulations*) and *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia until 2020* (hereinafter *Strategy*) – and for the reform changes relating to higher (university) education, primarily of a teacher. Elaboration of competency standards for the teaching profession was the result of a wish to improve the quality of education i.e. “to provide more competitive, high-quality and more efficient education for everyone” (Jevremov et al., 2016: 492); thus the first strategic premise of the *the Strategy* is that “no aim should be achieved to the detriment of quality” (*Strategy*, 2012: 18). Other specific aims of the reform refer to the change in the position of students and their participation in the educational process and learning. The emphasis has been put on students’ subjective position in relation to their independent decision-making, creation of curriculum through choice of courses and orientation, taking responsibility for their own education and active participation in the teaching process. Students – their needs, interests, knowledge and skills – have a central position in the reform process, since they are expected to acquire functional knowledge in this way, develop key competencies, and ensure their place in the employment market (Lugulov, 2011; Kopas Vukašinović & Golubović Ilić, 2016; Abykanova et al., 2016).

The word *competency* has been frequently used in the past several years “in different contexts and situations” (Nessipbayeva, 2012: 148), and it comprises a wide range of meanings. Taking this into account, we tried, from the aspect of competencies, to determine the place and position of students – future teachers, between *I know*, *I can* and *I should*. Development of teacher competencies is not the aim achieved once and for all, but a continuous process that only begins with initial, formal education. In this process, competencies represent a complex system – integration of declarative (*know about*), procedural (*know how*) and conditional (*know when*) knowledge. Having knowledge of a certain scientific area (*know about*), does not implicit or imply compulsory understanding of the methods and skills necessary for “passing on” this knowledge to others (*know how to teach*). Also, having knowledge of successful teaching methods, skills, and strategies (*know how*) does not mean or imply competency for successful teaching (the difference between *know* and *can*). A teacher can have an efficient strategy for delivery of certain contents, but instead of implementing it, he/she reaches out for usual, traditional methods.

The above outlined differences in teacher education have special significance, since they are the consequences of a discrepancy between: (1) knowledge and abilities acquired at the faculty, (2) skills necessary for implementation of

acquired knowledge and abilities in practice (teaching at schools), and (3) expectations and requirements prescribed by the education policy documents, directly reflecting upon the educational practice, as well as the quality of the educational process (Golubović Ilić & Stanković, 2018). Considering the fact that teachers “have a central role” (*Regulations*, 5/2011) and that the improvement of the educational system is conditioned by the improvement of teacher competencies, in this paper we focused on the education of future teachers, i.e. cohesion between their study programs and competencies which are expected of teachers in 21st century.

Higher Education Reform and Teacher Competencies

Aspirations and efforts to identify the efficient and successful organization of studies, to ascertain the knowledge and skills a teacher needs, have lasted for decades and resulted in numerous reforms and changes in the level, structure and length (duration) of teacher education. The initial [undergraduate] education, professional development and teacher competencies are a present-day research problem of contemporary education policies, not only in our country but in other countries as well. However, in our country, the teaching profession is one of the first professions strongly and directly affected by the competency-based approach, which puts the whole educational system under additional pressure, because it is expected to solve the majority of social issues. For these reasons, for the past several years educational reforms in our country have been focusing on the development of competencies in compliance with the example given by developed countries and countries with efficient educational systems (*competency based education*) and educational outcomes (Gajić et al., 2009; Bodroški Spariosu, 2015; Kopas Vukašinović, 2017). Educational outcomes are, in a broad sense, understood as “a definition of competencies students should develop during their studies”, with outcomes formulated and designed in a way that makes it possible “to gain an insight into the learning process from students` perspective, and not from the perspective of the teaching process needs” (Lungulov, 2015: 37). Thus, students are required to think and be active and university teaching needs to change from reproductive, “memorizing” into developing, “thinking” teaching, focused on the student (Stanković & Golubović Ilić, 2018).

The following key changes were made in the latest reform of higher education: “a) three cycles of studying were introduced in compliance with the Bologna Declaration, b) the *European Credit Transfer System* – ECTS was implemented, c) accreditation and exactly defined quality standards of study programs and institutions of higher education were introduced and d) Colleges have been transformed into Colleges of Applied Studies” (Mojić, 2015: 664). That process implied promotion of the paradigm “student focused education”

and “life long learning”, while concepts with a direct and dominant impact on the reform changes were “theory of teacher-researcher education, the concept of the reflexive practitioner, and the theory of professional identity development” (Radulović et al., 2010: 165).

According to the functional approach, which puts emphasis on the results of actions (Delamare Le Deist & Winterton, 2005: 39), elements which define competencies can be found in the selection of study program contents which lead to certain models of behaviour in specific practical situations in the classroom, with children, their parents, etc. Therefore, the curricula at Faculties of Education need to contain programs that will prepare future teachers for the functions of programmers, diagnosticians, evaluators and therapists. A functional teacher is creative, “always searching for new skills, ideas, interesting experiments, research projects [...] changing conditions, adapting and analysing them, creating new ones and thus giving contribution to students’ creative work” (Golubović & Stanković, 2016: 21). Being highly collaborative, helpful, willing to make compromises, benevolent, neat, “self-disciplined, with good control of impulses and dedicated to the profession” are the desired qualities (Genc et al., 2014: 52). Therefore, the modernization of study programs has great importance for development of university education and represents “a compulsory continuous process which will ensure cohesion between the expected learning outcomes and required competencies of graduate students” (*Strategy*, 2012: 121). In the 21st century, teachers are expected to possess contemporary knowledge, to be able to implement it, to be ready to learn continuously and search for creative solutions to the problems, to be resourceful and flexible in emerging situations, adaptable to new requirements, skilful in overcoming obstacles by using modern means, techniques and approaches (Naumescu, 2008; Gajić et al., 2009). However, results of considerable research (Snoek et al., 2010; Akiri & Ugborugbo, 2009; Muzenda, 2013; Mojić, 2015; Jevremov et al., 2016) which show that students’ educational achievements and efficiency of studying depend on the quality of work of university teachers and their competencies, leading to “closing the circle” of the education of those who educate the ones who will educate is the foundation of the quality of the entire educational system.

Importance and Weaknesses of the Initial [Undergraduate] Education of Teachers

It is not untrue to say that the teaching profession is extremely complex and difficult, that it requires a lot of effort, renunciation and dedication and, due to continuous progressive changes in the educational system, as well as in other areas (technical and technological, information technology, etc.) imposes new expectations and requirements on a daily basis. Nowadays, initial

[undergraduate] education is not a sufficient prerequisite for a successful teaching profession, since the “learning society” requires revitalizing and updating of previous knowledge and skills, with an adequate reaction to and acceptance of new standards of quality. For students of today keeping up with the times is not enough; it is also necessary to have the ability for self-education, i.e. professional and personal self-development (Abykanova et al., 2016). This means that, besides competencies for the learning area, subject, methodology of teaching, teaching, and learning (according to the *Regulations 5/2011*), it is necessary for teachers to master the skills which enable professional development, changes in the usual behaviour, professional actions and habits, objectivity and certainty in the decision making process. In the process of modernization, a modern class teacher or a teacher in a higher education institution, has to be prepared for and aware of the necessity to make changes in stereotypes in his/her behaviour and professional activities.

Future teachers should be open to innovations and critical in respect of their own experience in order to, through transformation of initial [undergraduate] education, interlace it with practical experience and professional development, continually developing , extending and upgrading their competencies. In this process, a teacher has to assess his/her achievements objectively, to question his/her work and try to improve his/her weaknesses through various forms of personal development.

One of the conditions necessary for a successful teaching profession is personality structure and characteristics, since teachers are role models to most of their students; the existing standards of competencies in our country lack *Competence Personality / Personal Competence*. A teaching profession should be chosen by stable, independent persons with a “consistent, generous, wise and reasonable, dignified, mature and just personality” (Hakim, 2015), therefore the selection of candidates for teaching profession requires special attention. According to Tolstoy, the teaching profession is sublime and noble, yet a teacher is not the one who has been raised and educated to be a teacher, but one who deeply believes that he/she is a teacher and that there is nothing else he/she can be. Recruitment of students – future teachers should be the response of a responsible society and educational system to the needs of the employment market and society as a whole; however, in our country, unfortunately there is no such a thing as standards stating who can teach in schools and be a teacher.

Method

Crucial factors for the successful functioning of an educational system are: selection of candidates, their professional identity (personality structure) and

the professional competencies of teachers, while teachers are at a tri-point of expectations: a) immediate surroundings – students¹, parents and colleagues; b) wider surroundings – representatives of other professions and the community, and c) the state – educational system and society as a whole. Each of them attributes more importance to certain segments of their profession, depending on what they consider to be important, thus “some put the emphasis on expertise in the relevant scientific area (knowledge of the science ‘subject matter’), some on the didactical and methodical knowledge (successfully passing on knowledge), and some on supporting students development” (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000, according to Genc et al., 2014: 51). In this respect, the subject of our research were competencies of a teacher in the 21st century seen from two aspects: the official national document with the list of teachers competencies, and the outcomes of a study program for future teachers at the Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac.²

The aim of the paper was, by means of comparative and theoretical analysis, to find out if there is discrepancy or cohesion between competencies for teaching profession which are prescribed by *the Regulations* and those anticipated by study programs for future teachers at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina. We compared the educational outcomes outlined in the study programs³ of compulsory courses – the course Methodology of Teaching⁴ in academic years III and IV of basic academic studies (hereinafter BAS) in the study program for *class teacher education*, with competency standards for the teaching profession, and critically analysed them in comparison to the competencies stated in *the Regulations* (5/2012). On this occasion, our attention was directed to the following research tasks:

- to ascertain if educational outcomes comprise all aspects of competencies – *knowledge, planning, implementation, assessment/evaluation and professional development*;
- if the educational outcomes gave priority to the development of competencies for the *learning area, subject and methodology of teaching* or to *teaching and learning*.

Student competencies for *communication and cooperation* with partners in their educational work (with students, parents, colleagues, local community) have not been the subject of our analysis, but not because we consider them less necessary or important in comparison to the former types of competencies. These competencies were not considered in more detail for two reasons: firstly,

¹ In higher education of students – Genc et al., 2014.

² Hereinafter FPNJ

³ <https://pefja.kg.ac.rs/wp-content/uploads/Knjiga%20predmeta/OASU.pdf>

⁴ Hereinafter MN

because communicative competencies of students at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina are developed within other study programs⁵ as well, and secondly, because this would, in our opinion, result in exceeding the framework. For similar reasons we have not considered teacher competencies for *supporting students and their development*.

Standard teacher competencies outlined in *the Regulations* have been compared with educational outcomes of six study programs in academic year three (Methodology of Teaching Serbian Language and Literature, Methodology of Teaching Mathematics, Methodology of Teaching Science and Social Studies, Methodology of Teaching Music Culture, Methodology of Teaching Art, and Methodology of Teaching Physical Education) and six study programs of compulsory courses in academic year four (Methodical Practicums – hereinafter MP), since the answer to the question of how to “equip” and train future teachers for efficient and professional “individual and social functioning” has already been integrated in the outcomes of study programs.

Research Results with Discussion

Expected professional competencies of a teacher are in direct relation with the choice of educational contents, thus when establishing the structure of study plans, it is necessary to choose things considered to be key factors for development of these competencies. Study Program BAS: Class Teacher at the Faculty of Education in Jagodina, which was constituted in compliance with the Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Serbia and the Bologna Declaration⁶, aims to train students for teaching in lower grades of primary school.

When it comes to competencies needed for *the learning area, subject and methodology of teaching*, teachers should primarily have a wide and deep knowledge regarding the school subjects they teach in primary schools (Partono Prasetio et al., 2017). Being competent and professional in this discourse means to possess the appropriate body of knowledge of, roughly speaking, six basic scientific areas: Serbian Language and Literature, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies, Art, Music Culture, and Physical Education. This is mostly achieved during the first two academic years within the study programs of compulsory courses (see *Book of Courses*, BAS: Class Teacher). *Competencies for the Methodology of Teaching* have special importance for future teachers, because besides basic scientific knowledge, teacher competency includes skills and behaviour which help or enhance the capabilities of a teacher to educate,

⁵ Academic year one: Communicology Basics – compulsory course; Speaking Skills and Communication, Interaction and Communication in educational work –elective courses; academic year two: Rhetorics – elective courses

⁶ <https://pefja.kg.ac.rs/osnovne-akademske-studije-ucitelj/>

teach, guide, direct, train, and evaluate the pupils” (Partono Prasetyo et al., 2017: 87). Educational outcomes of the above mentioned courses have been analysed from various aspects of competencies: *knowledge, planning, implementation, assessment/evaluation, and professional development.*

In the domain of **knowledge**, *possession of didactic and methodical knowledge necessary for the subject which a teacher is teaching*, is the most important for our research, because the quality of teaching is not defined only by the way it is organized, but also by “special aspects related to teachers’ actions” (Jevremov et al., 2016: 500). In order to “act” in an appropriate and efficient way, teachers should have certain didactic and methodical knowledge. By analysing study programs in academic year III, we have come to the following results: 1) the most complete formulation of outcomes from the aspect of didactic and methodology knowledge⁷ was given in the study program of Methodology of Teaching Music Culture, since the emphasis is on delivery of learning contents, fostering the musical abilities of primary school students, working with the school choir and orchestra, and appropriate usage of modern teaching technologies, with pedagogical and professional music literature. In this methodology, the domain of **knowledge** is interlaced with the domain of **implementation**, in spite of the fact that students in academic year III should acquire theoretical knowledge which will, in academic year IV, be implemented in schools where teaching practice is carried out; 2) the emphasized didactic and methodological knowledge is found in outcomes formulated in Methodology of Teaching Science and Social Studies (after successful completion of the course, students are expected to have acquired basic knowledge [...], to be able to prepare teaching materials and lesson plans on their own) and in Methodology of Teaching Art (a student “is acquainted with specific procedures of artistic techniques and their passing on to students; mastering⁸ forms, methods and principles of Methodology of Teaching Art”). Least attention was dedicated to didactic and methodical knowledge in outcomes of Methodology of Teaching Physical Education, where the domain of **implementation** prevails: “A student can independently [...] deliver activities with primary school students [...] and implement modern exercising methods”; Methodology of Teaching Serbian Language and Literature: “A student has been trained to teach initial reading and writing; analysis of literary works; practical usage of grammar and orthography in teaching [...] and use practical methods for developing students’ culture of speech and expanding vocabulary”, and Methodology of Teaching Mathematics, where competencies for the *learning area and subject* have been primarily emphasized, while the outcomes (“implements modern teaching systems”) only partially refer to the

⁷ Although the formulation refers to the aim instead to the outcome (“to enable students to...”) – remark of the author

⁸ In our opinion, a formulation which refers to the outcome should be “master“, “has mastered“ or “knows“ – remark of the author

domain of **implementation**, and not to didactic and methodical knowledge necessary for teaching the school subject Mathematics in class teaching.

In the domain of **planning**, *the Regulations* specify, among other things, that a teacher plan his/her work so that it is receptive, understandable, and interesting to students; he/she plans implementation of various methods, techniques, and forms of teaching, as well as the evaluation of prescribed educational standards and learning aims. By analysing the outcomes of study programs in academic years III and IV, we found that the segment of planning was neglected, namely that development of student competencies in this domain is not part of the analysed study programs. The outcomes defined in the context of training students for planning are found in the study program Methodology of Teaching Science and Social Studies (“students are expected to make independently a curricular draft of **learning subjects**”) and Methodology of Teaching Art (“preparation and implementation of a yearly and monthly plan”) in academic year III, i.e. in the study program Methodological Practicums of the Study Program for Physical Education (“a student independently plans, programs, [...] activities with primary school students”) in the academic year IV.

In the domain of **implementation**, considering competencies for *the learning area, subject and methodology of teaching*, a teacher is expected to achieve aims in compliance with general educational principles, aims and outcomes; to correlate learning contents with students’ previous knowledge and experience, their needs, examples from everyday life, contents from other areas, contemporary achievements; to implement various methodological approaches (underlined by the authors). Although, as we previously emphasized, the concept of a study plan was made in order to provide students with theoretical knowledge during academic year III, with the emphasis on their practical training in academic year four, in outcomes of most study programs (except for Methodology of Teaching Art), we noticed elements of practical implementation and inconsistency, a discrepancy with the competencies stated in *the Regulations*.

Considering the competencies related to *teaching and learning*, according to *the Regulations*, a teacher is expected to apply various forms of teaching and activities in compliance with the knowledge and experience of students, their individual characteristics and needs; to encourage, support and assist different learning styles and strategies; to develop and implement various cognitive skills; to support students in expressing their ideas freely, asking questions, discussing, and commenting (*the Regulations*, 5/2012: 5). In this case, results of the comparative analysis suggest coherency of the analysed documents, since the implementation of curriculum contents is expected as an outcome of study programs of all six methodical practicums in academic year IV.

Competencies in the domain of **assessment/evaluation** in academic year III, have been stated only in the educational outcomes of Methodology of Teaching Serbian Language and Literature (a student teacher has been trained for [...])

monitoring and assessment of primary school students' progress) and Methodology of Teaching Science and Social Studies ([...] *continuous monitoring and integrated evaluation of primary school students' work*), while they are present in the outcomes of methodical practicums only in Methodology of Teaching Physical Education ("evaluates motoric abilities of a student") and Methodology of Teaching Science and Social Studies (a student has been trained to "monitor the teaching process and assess primary school students' progress using various assessment types and techniques"). Knowing that students do not study thoroughly enough the contents related to possibilities, monitoring methods, evaluation of primary school students' work and progress in the previous academic years (only partially within the Didactics course), we consider this to be a serious downside. Testing and assessing primary school students is an important and necessary part of the teaching process for which competencies cannot be developed spontaneously and incidentally, nor it would be good to do this part of their job unprofessionally and intuitively. Taking into account the fact that assessment in the first grade is descriptive, and numerical in higher grades, it is essential to have a study program/course within which future students could develop the above-mentioned competencies.

Special attention in this domain was dedicated to fostering students' critical thinking about didactic and methodical segments of classes they deliver practically in schools where teaching practice is carried out "which is the essence of self-reflection" (Cekić Jovanović & Golubović Ilić, 2011: 59). Outcomes of all methodical practicums, except for Physical Education, expect students to develop competencies for evaluation and self-evaluation, i.e. critical evaluation and methodical analysis of delivered classes, theirs, as well as their colleagues' classes, which is in compliance with the paradigm of educating a teacher to be a reflexive practitioner (Radulović, 2011; Maksimović & Bandjur, 2013; Korthagen, 2014).

In the domain of **professional development**, in none of the six analysed study programs were there outcomes which refer to development of student competencies for continuous monitoring and development of personal pedagogical practice. By what means and how can teachers develop competencies for thinking, objective perception and evaluation of their work, planning and responsible and autonomous decision making in relation to their professional development? Future teachers should be aware that their education is not finished after graduation, but it continues in the form of continuously working on themselves, education on changes and novelties in education, being well informed about literature, and attending seminars, professional, academic conferences, etc. Professionals will deal with various problems and situations in the classroom, which are mainly unpredictable and context-based, by implementing the knowledge acquired through formal education, but, mainly, by considering practice from different perspectives, understanding situations in a

different way, knowledge and experience acquired through professional development (Korthagen, 2014).

Conclusion

By comparing teacher competency standards and educational outcomes of study programs in BAS in the study program for class teacher education, we have come to the conclusion that educational outcomes have not equally comprised all domains of competency. Competencies in the domain of *planning* have not been included in educational outcomes of most study programs we have analysed, while there is a large discrepancy relating to competencies in the domain of *assessment/evaluation* and *professional development*. Upon completion of basic academic studies, students are neither properly nor sufficiently trained for planning, programming and developing strategies required for achievement of aims and outcomes of primary education⁹, not even for continuous monitoring, testing and assessment of students¹⁰, thus we should, in the next accreditation period, consider and create methods for overcoming these deficiencies.

In outcomes of study programs, competencies for the *learning area, subject and methodology of teaching* prevail in comparison to competencies for *teaching and learning*, and domains of *knowledge* and *implementation* have not been clearly demarcated. Knowing that teachers cannot do their jobs efficiently and in compliance with high standards without didactic and methodical knowledge and skills, we would find a solution by making changes in the system and introducing study programs which will directly prepare future teachers for their forthcoming challenges. Enhancing the quality of studies is possible in courses where students are taught how to master skills and methods of *how*, not the knowledge of *what*, to teach their pupils, and practice-oriented teaching. The time of traditional beliefs that studying “academic disciplines” in combination with “teaching talent” is sufficient for a high-quality teacher’s performance, subject-oriented teaching in which the emphasis is on the reproductive assimilation of knowledge where students are allowed to “manage on their own” and implement this knowledge when necessary, is long gone.

The fact is that countries whose primary-school students achieve best results in international testing and whose educational systems are said to be the best in Europe do not have a list of standard teacher competencies, which makes us believe that these actually inhibit and limit a teacher in important aspects of teaching. Competency standards stated in *the Regulations* are, for the

⁹ Zakon o osnovnom obrazovanju i vaspitanju, član 21

¹⁰ Pravilnik o ocenjivanju učenika u osnovnom obrazovanju i vaspitanju, br. 72/09, 52/11 и 55/13

most part, formulated using the syntagm “a teacher should”: know, understand, implement... which could be understood as a kind of *shouldology* – declared, expected teacher performance in defined areas. In our opinion, this leads to “moulding”, restraining and “suffocating” teachers’ creativity, inventiveness, and originality; thus, it would be interesting for future research to find out what teachers’ beliefs about this question are. This paper opens many questions: selection of candidates for faculties of education, developing motivation and students’ awareness of the need to take responsibility for their own education, the need to redefine educational outcomes in precise and clear descriptions of what a student should *know*, *understand* and *be able to do* upon completion of studies, the need for professional development and supervised work of university teachers etc. In the future, the research should examine attitudes of graduate students towards content and purpose of some study programs, characteristics and abilities of university teachers which students consider to be important for their education, possibilities and methods for modernizing university teaching and many other segments of teacher education, but within the academic context, in order not to reduce educational reform to “rewriting ready-made solutions” from other countries, and higher education to “serial production” of incompetent and unprofessional workers.

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