

Subjective Evaluation of Demands on Performance of Teacher Professional Activities

Abstract

The paper presents partial results of the research identifying demands on the performance of professional competences in the school practice in teachers¹ with various length of practice and in student teachers. Results are compared with the findings and results of the national report in the OECD international report TALIS 2008.

Keywords: *professional standard, functional literacy, professional competences, educational activities, subjective demands on performance, international research studies*

Introduction

In the 90^s of the 20th century the essence of teacher professionalism in the creation of school curricula began to be identified through *key competences*. We perceive them as the means and goals of education, enabling individuals to successfully involve in social interactions while preserving their own independence in a familiar environment, but also in new unforeseen situations. Today, current preparation of future teachers accentuates a shift from the traditional model of *minimum competence* (transfer of content to pupils) to the model of broad professionalism (*the reflective practitioner*), considering the teacher as the basis

¹ Due to the common use of the terms pupil, student and teacher in the masculine gender also to designate female teachers, pupils and students, we do not use a gender-sensitive language.

for improvement in the quality of education, considering him self-developing, self-reflecting, able to analyse his own activity, pupil needs and to respond to them properly (Korthagen, F., 1992; Schön, D.A, 1987; Lasley, T.J., 1992). Teacher training is competence-based in the context of functional literacy so that state contents of education are compatible with the goals of education in EU and OECD countries. In this context, we are aware of the fact that the competence-based approaches have their limits and are specific in their context.

Professional Competences in the Teacher's Work

The new approaches also change requirements on teachers, related to the level of the development of their *professional competences* defined as observable and demonstrable competences in the teaching practice, required for qualified performance of educational activities. Within their practical training, students of the teaching profession should encounter activities directly affecting formation of their professional competences in behaviour, cognition and experience, with the aim to match the emerging professional competences with the requirements of a proposed and discussed professional standard created academically, thus possibly including errors arising from idealization of the teaching profession.

Professional Activities of the Teacher

The Slovak model of professional competences is simple and contains clear designations and contents of professional competences further elaborated into specific skills observable in specific *educational activities* (what the teacher does).

In general, older and current opinions of experts in teacher professional activities also agree with foreign authors (Portner, H., 2008; Jones, J., 2010; Cooper, J.M., 1995) that examination of teacher professional activities requires analysis of the teacher's real activities constituting his performance. We define some common educational activities in the system of educational activities, in the performance of which teachers of different school types and grades as well as future teachers (students of education faculties) declare various levels of difficulties. Some of them are analysed in the paper. We proceed from findings of the pedagogical research into the profession and professiography of the primary education teacher (B. Kasáčová – P. Tabačáková, 2010), the objective of which was to identify specific professional activities of primary education

teachers within the conditions of educational reality, to record and discover their structure, and to determine the ratio of particular activities in relation to full professional performance and to outline a professiogram draft. In their further research of the pre-primary and primary education teaching profession (2011), the author with the project team were looking for answers to the questions what teachers really do, how they can identify their professional activities and how they perform them during and out of their working hours and how much time they spend doing them.

Demands on Performance of Educational Activities in the Context of Research Findings

The body of the paper presents some results of our own research in 2012 (Rovňanová, L., 2013), the purpose of which was to find out how respondents with various length of teaching practice perceive and assess demands on the performance of specific educational activities in the conditions of school reality. Due to the limited size of the paper, only the results of the first ten, in the respondents' opinion the most demanding educational activities, are presented out of the list of 31 educational activities assessed by the respondents and out of them, in more detail, those where the respondents agreed and which were also comparable with the results of other research.

Research Sample and Method

The research sample (N=318) was not representative and consisted of respondents with teaching practice of different lengths: full-time students in the 2nd year of the Master's course without experience (only that within various types of practical training attended during their studies) from various branches of study at the Faculty of Education (n=66), Faculty of Humanities (n=57) and Faculty of Natural Sciences (n=35) of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (N=158) and teachers (N=160) of secondary education ISCED2 (n=100) and ISCED3 (n=60) from various regions of Slovakia, with prevalence of the region of Banská Bystrica. Qualifications were neglected. The sample was composed mostly of women (67.61%). Two questionnaires of our own design were used for both respondent groups.

Results

For comparison, Table 1 shows the order of 10 most demanding educational activities according to the research findings of S. Bendl (1997) and O. Šimoník (1994). Matching results of the compared studies are in bold letters.

Table 1. Demands on Teachers' Educational Activities

	S. Bendl (1997, N = 177)	O. Šimoník (1994, N = 141)
	1 working with non-achievers	working with non-achievers
	2 maintaining discipline in the classroom	maintaining discipline in the classroom
	3 applying individual approach	retaining pupils' attention
	4 retaining pupils' attention	diagnosing pupil personality
order	5 evaluating and marking pupils	motivating pupils
	6 selecting methods for upbringing	individual communication with pupils' parents
	7 dealing with disciplinary offences	conducting meetings with parents
	8 motivating pupils	adequate responses to unexpected development of lessons
	9 working with above-average pupils	dealing with disciplinary offences
	10 meeting obligations of upbringing	activating pupils

P. Urbánek (1997) conducted research into students after their continuous teaching practice. He found out educational activities in which they had difficulties and compared their opinions with their mentors' opinions on their performance. We arranged the results in the order in Table 2. They match the compared studies in four activities.

Table 2. Demands on Students' Educational Activities according to P. Urbánek

	P. Urbánek (1997, N = 85)
	1 curriculum timing
	2 evaluating pupils
	3 properly formulating learning tasks and questions
	4 maintaining pedagogical documentation
order	5 adjusting teaching to the pupil's age
	6 retaining pupils' attention
	7 dealing with disciplinary offences
	8 maintaining discipline
	9 motivating pupils *
	10 organizing individual work of pupils *

* added by mentors

For our research, 31 educational activities were processed (also those occurring in the above results) and presented to the respondents to identify a subjective level of demands on specific educational activities, regularly performed within the teaching practice, on the scale from 0 to 6, where: 0- I perform always without difficulties, 1- I have difficulties only exceptionally, 2- sometimes, 3- often, 4- very often, 5- I perform always with difficulties, 6- I perform with difficulties and need help. On the basis of their opinions, educational activities were identified which they manage without difficulties within the practice and in which, on the contrary, they have difficulties and need support in their further development. Table 3 shows the first ten in the order. The majority of the difficulties concerned the social, relation-forming aspect of the process of education. We obtained similar results as the compared research, only with the activities in a different order. It is surprising that some of them, considered demanding by the theory of education (explanation of the teaching stuff, evaluation...), were marked as little demanding by the students. We agree with j. Průcha (1997) and O. Šimoník (1994) that it is a case of a simplified understanding of such activities, relating to insufficient experience and self-reflection.

Table 3. Demands on Educational Activities- original research by L. Rovňanová (done in 2012)

	Teachers (n = 160)	Students (n = 158)
	1 work with pupils with special educational needs	work with pupils with special educational needs
	2 work with non-achievers	timing the curriculum throughout the whole school year*
	3 dealing with disciplinary offences	individual communication with parents*
	4 not only to teach, but also to bring up, develop personality through the content	maintenance of school documentation *
order	5 maintaining discipline during lessons	dealing with disciplinary offences*
	6 selecting methods for upbringing	work with non-achievers*
	7 retaining pupils' attention	exercising pedagogical supervision*
	8 activating pupils	diagnosing the pupil's personality
	9 diagnosing the pupil's personality	not only to teach, but also to bring up, develop personality through the content
	10 applying individual approach to pupils	selecting methods for upbringing

* Students have **minimum or no experience** in the activities: 10.76% of the students had no experience in dealing with disciplinary offences and as many as 40.51% had no experience in exercising pedagogical supervision of pupils.

The comparison results of both groups of respondents' opinions are presented, together with descriptive statistics, in Table 4 including those opinions where both

groups agreed (6): 1- work with pupils with special educational needs, 2- work with non-achievers, 3- dealing with disciplinary problems and offences, 4- using content as a means of upbringing and development of the pupil's personality, 5- selecting methods for upbringing, 6 – diagnosing the pupil's personality.

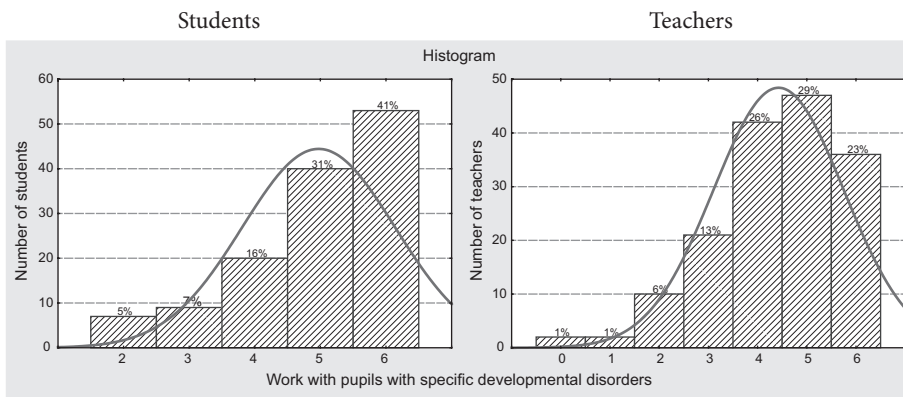
Table 4. Demands on Educational Activities (1-6)- Descriptive Statistics

ED activities	Teachers n=160						Students n=158						Mann-Whitney U test <i>p-value</i>	Spearman's correlation <i>rs</i>		
	mean	median	mode	number.	variance	standard deviation	original order	mean	median	mode	number.	variance			standard deviation	original order
1	4.40	5	5	47	1.738	1.318	1	4.95	5	6	53	1.342	1.158	1	0.00020	-0.19617
2	2.89	3	3	57	1.409	1.187	2	3.10	3	3	54	1.455	1.206	6	0.20638	-0.05763
3	2.48	2	2	62	1.031	1.015	3	3.26	3	2	37	2.534	1.592	5	0.00002	-0.20853
4	2.27	2	2	67	1.078	1.038	4	2.47	2	2	65	1.321	1.149	9	0.19939	-0.05057
5	2.16	2	2	80	1.013	1.007	6	2.36	2	2	57	1.310	1.144	10	0.12370	-0.06224
6	1.93	2	2	73	0.945	0.972	9	2.63	2	2	57	1.191	1.113	8	0.00000	-0.29853

In both groups of respondents, the first place on the list of activities difficult to perform was occupied by the **work with pupils with special educational needs** (1).

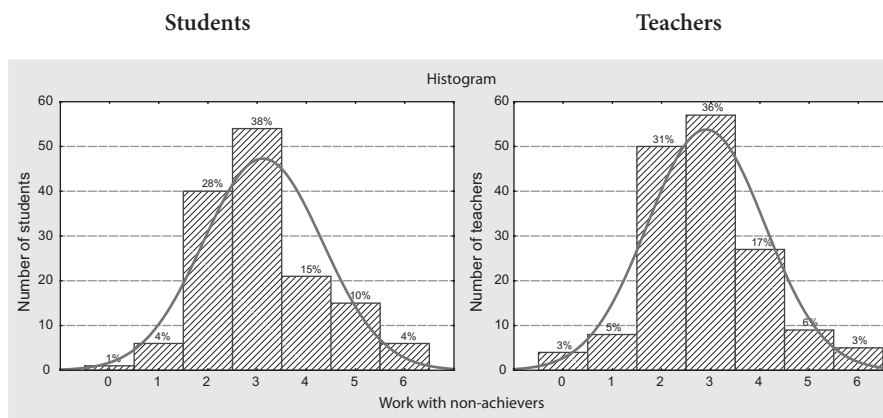
The value of $p = 0.00020$ indicates the occurrence of a statistically significant difference and the value of Spearman's correlation $r_s = -0.19617$ a correlation of the length of teaching practice and demands on performance in that activity- the longer the practice, the fewer the difficulties. University training in inclusive education is still insufficient. Graphic comparison is given in comparative histograms, Graph 1.

Today, classes are common in the school practice, with individual integration of pupils subject to special-education diagnostics, with various difficulties- from developmental learning disorders, physical handicaps to ADHD Syndrome, or Asperger's Syndrome and other behavioural deficits. This group includes also talented and gifted pupils. There is an increasing number of classes with a high number of children from marginalized Romany communities and socially disadvantaged environments. Working with them requires specific competences that are, according to V. Belková (2010), still insufficiently developed during the university training of future teachers- despite more than twenty years of effort by experts accentuating the need for education of all teaching staff (those in training for the profession as well as those already in service).

Graph 1. Comparative Histograms: Work with Pupils with Special Educational Needs

A special group of pupils are non-achievers (2). Both groups of respondents, but particularly the teachers, state that work with them is demanding- this activity is in the second place in the overall order. We see the cause in the everyday experience of the teachers confronted with the problem of choice of effective teaching strategies supporting the shift of non-achievers to achievement that would match their developable dispositions. Success in this activity is directly connected with the teacher's reflection, self-reflection, diagnostic competences and preparedness for using them in the school practice as effectively as possible (Kouteková, M., 2007; Hupková, M., 2006).

There are neither statistically significant differences in the above activity, nor connection of demands on the activity with the changing length of teaching practice (Table 4). Graphic comparison is shown in the comparative histograms, Graph 2.

Graph 2. Comparative Histograms: Work with Non-Achieving Children

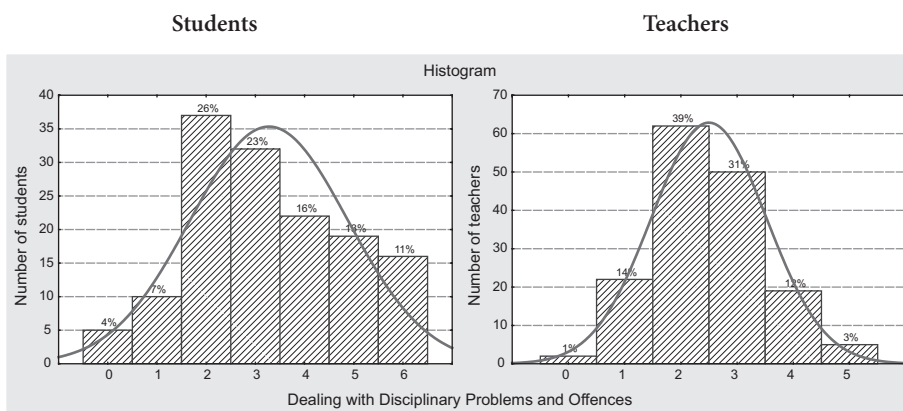
School teachers' serious problem is pupil discipline. It is perceived by parents, teachers, but also by pupils, and maybe even more critically than by the teachers. Activities connected with pupil discipline belong to the important areas of educational needs of teachers in practice, as well as student teachers.

This fact is also supported by the results of the international research by OECD TALIS 2008 (2010). We state, in agreement with the authors of the national study (Koršňáková, P., Kováčová, J., 2010) that discipline has a significant influence on the course and effectiveness of teaching; it affects the climate in the classroom and mutual relations between the teacher and the pupils, as well as among the pupils.

Maintaining discipline in the classroom and during breaks involves dealing with disciplinary problems and offences (3). The difference is at a high level of statistical significance ($p = 0.00002$) and there is also a connection between the length of teaching practice and demands on the performance of this activity- the longer the practice the lesser the difficulties (the value of Spearman's correlation $r_s = -0.20853$).

Graphic comparison for this educational activity is in the comparative histograms, Graph 3.

Graph 3. Comparative Histograms: Dealing with Disciplinary Problems and Offences



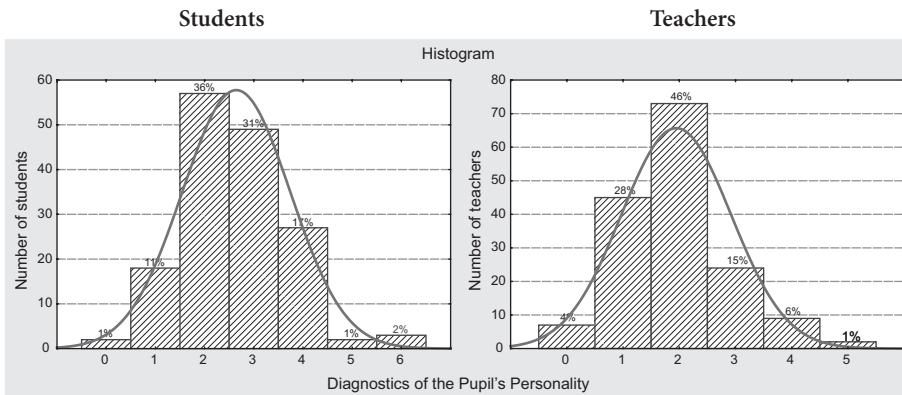
Maintaining discipline in the classroom is considered one of the most demanding educational activities not only by teacher graduates, but also by teachers with various length of teaching practice. According to S. Veenman (1984), up to 85% of the respondents from western countries, the USA, Canada and Australia, positioned *maintaining discipline in the classroom* in the first place of problematic activities in the teacher's work. J. Vašutová (2007, p. 58) states that before attending practical training, student teachers are concerned the most about not being

able to win respect, maintain discipline in the classroom and respond properly to non-standard situations. Guiding pupils during lessons and breaks is connected with the teacher’s personality type, while, according to S. Kariková (1999), the same have more dimensions and various effects on the development of the pupil’s personality. A successful teacher has reasonable authority in the classroom, uses appropriate upbringing strategies, methods for a particular situational educational context and structure of the classroom. Pupils’ behaviour at school is not an isolated phenomenon, to regulate which a few strategies and procedures suffice, but a complex process requiring excellent diagnostic competences in teachers to learn about their pupils, enough time and other factors considerably influencing the climate in the classroom. School discipline is the goal, means and result of education. It is influenced by requirements on pupils in the family and at school, mainly in the management of self-control and conscious discipline. If they mutually synergically complement each other, the teacher’s work is simpler. If there is a discrepancy in the requirements on discipline between the family and the school, the teacher’s work at school is much more demanding. The importance of preventive socio-educational work with pupils was indicated also by I. Emmerová (2012), accentuating the need to capture mainly problem pupils and subsequently to work with them intensely.

Diagnostic competences (6) belong to the most demanding activities, on which success in the performance of all other activities depends. Graphic comparison for this activity is presented in the comparative histograms, Graph 4.

The difference is statistical at a very high level of significance ($p = 0.00000$, in round figures) and there is also a connection between the length of the teaching

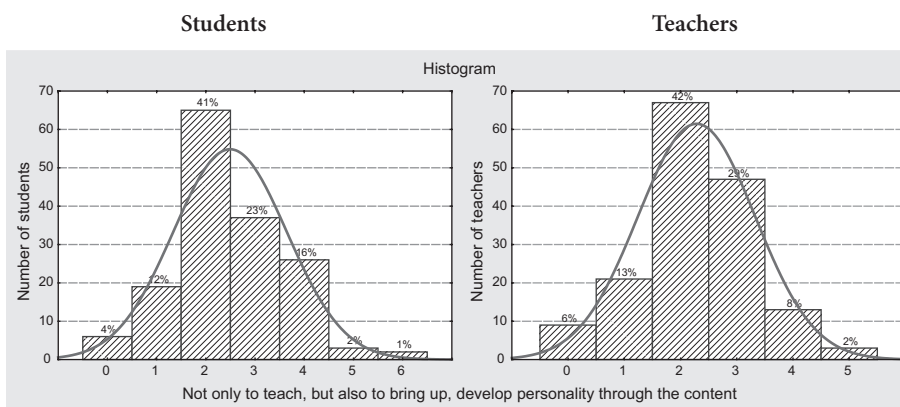
Graph 4. Comparative Histograms: Diagnostics of the Pupil’s Personality



practice and demands on the performance of this activity: the longer the practice, the fewer the difficulties (value of Spearman's correlation $r_s = -0.29853$).

Diagnostic competences in the context of learning about the pupil make it possible to create optimum conditions for pupils' effective learning. Diagnostic competences are closely connected with the selection of an optimum method of upbringing. The following histograms, Graph 5 and Graph 6, illustrate our findings in the use of content as a means of upbringing and the development of the pupil's personality (4) and selection of methods for upbringing (5). Neither statistically significant differences, nor any connection between demands on the performance and changing length of teaching practice were found there. It is important to realize that the contents of qualification subjects are also means for upbringing and the development of the pupil's personality. By proper didactical use of the content a creative teacher is able to create a favourable working climate in the classroom and to prevent disciplinary problems.

Graph 5. Comparative Histograms: Content as a Means for Upbringing and Development of the Pupil's Personality



Based on the values of Spearman's correlations in Table 5, we state that a connection between the decline of difficulties in the performance of an educational activity and the increasing length of teaching practice was confirmed only in the educational activities no. 1, 3 and 6. All educational activities also positively correlated with each other: difficulties in the performance of one educational activity were confirmed by difficulties in the one with which it was compared.

The above-mentioned research findings reflect some difficulties of the respondents in practice, at the same time confirming and supplementing other similar

research. Their analysis indicates some shortcomings in the current teacher training and in continuing education.

Graph 6. Comparative Histograms: Selection of Methods for Upbringing

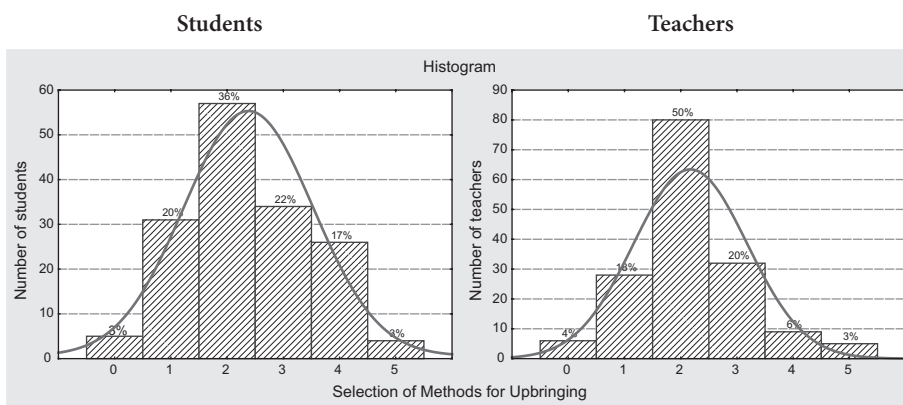


Table 5. Correlation Table (Spearman's Correlations): Educational Activities 1- 6, age, length of the respondents' practice and the activities with each other

	Age	Practice	1	2	3	4	5	6
Age		0.9255	-0.2216	-0.0908	-0.2447	-0.2706	-0.0711	-0.3127
Practice	0.9255		-0.1962	-0.0576	-0.2085	-0.2518	-0.0622	-0.2985
1	-0.2216	-0.1962		0.4836	0.4023	0.3649	0.3156	0.3739
2	-0.0908	-0.0576	0.4836		0.4550	0.4675	0.4502	0.4977
3	-0.2447	-0.2085	0.4023	0.4550		0.4866	0.4418	0.4673
4	-0.2706	-0.2518	0.3649	0.4675	0.4866		0.4418	0.4673
5	-0.0711	-0.0622	0.3156	0.4503	0.4418	0.6616		0.5619
6	-0.3127	-0.2985	0.3739	0.4977	0.4673	0.5737	0.5619	

Legend: 1 – work with pupils with special educational needs, 2 – work with non-achievers, 3 – dealing with disciplinary problems and offences, 4 – using content as a means of pupil upbringing and personality development, 6 – pupil personality diagnostics

Conclusions

The research findings lead us to the inevitable orientation of teacher pre-graduate training to the development of developable dispositions of the teacher, real skills linked to a specific context of educational situations so that they manage

to deal with and reflect on new, non-standard situations flexibly and creatively. It is a way of teacher functional literacy formation. It does not appear automatically or suddenly, but is built in a gradual process of the teacher's career development (K. László, 2010).

It would be naive to think that we will create perfect teachers only by a well-thought out organization of pre-graduate and post-graduate training. No matter how we try to train graduates, the final form of their change into teachers is in the sole power of the real practice and the teachers themselves. In this process, health and fitness, intelligence, motivation for the teaching profession, personality traits and working conditions play an important role.

It follows from the above that future teachers should be led to a deeper knowledge of educational situations and arrive at their understanding based on professional reflection and self-reflection of their educational activities under the supervision of experienced instructors and teacher trainers during their studies, later, in service, under well-trained mentors' supervision, and a good offer of educational programmes in continuing education.

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