

2. SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND THE PROFILE OF THE STUDENT ASPIRING TO THE TEACHING CAREER

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Abstract: *Along with the specific skills developed during psycho-pedagogical training programs of future teachers, the expected attitudes that a teacher should perform are also relevant. These attitudes can outline the area of social competence - without which the activity of a future teacher is ineffective. This socio-emotional behaviour is based on the ability to listen and learn from the other, to understand what the child feels by supporting and respecting him at the same time, the ability to create relationships. In this context, we consider that the option for the teaching profession, along with the logical arguments invoked by each applicant, is also based on justifications such as: it suits my way of being, I like to explain, I help others to understand, I was told that I know how to listen, I feel good around others, I am a person willing to offer support to others, etc. Starting from these aspects, we set out to investigate the profile of the student following the psycho-pedagogical module regarding the following dimensions - assertiveness, empathy, self-presentation and the ability to develop positive interpersonal relationships. The working hypothesis is that in the profile of the student preparing for the teacher profession we find these dimensions or specific elements. We also hypothesized that a high level of assertiveness would also result in a high level of problem-solving skills. The conducted investigation highlighted the fact that indeed the choice of a training path in the teaching career is based on an above average level of the variables assertiveness, self-presentation and the ability to develop positive interpersonal relationships with others. It can be observed, however, that the ability to resolve conflicts is at a low level, which may indicate the difficulty of students to effectively apply communication strategies in managing difficult relationships. We conclude that the activities of self-knowledge and personal development integrated in the psycho-pedagogical training programme are essential for the development of self-evaluation skills and for applying the self-perceived potential of students in effective social interactions.*

Key words: *profile, student, teaching career, social skills*

1. Social competence and its role in the teaching profession

The development of social competence is essential for future functioning in society and for reducing the risk of behavioural and emotional problems. There is research that proves that the development of social competence in childhood is related to skill in other areas in adult life (Gomez-Lopez et al., 2022,). For example, people who, as children, easily develop good relationships with others, are more likely to become adults in better health—they live longer, are more resilient to mental health problems, and function better in society (Luthar, 2006). Socially competent children are more likely to advance academically (Denham, 2010). Conversely, low social competence can generate peer rejection, social anxiety (La Greca and Lopez, 1998), aggression and aggressiveness (Warden and Mackinnon, 2003).

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In recent years, international organizations such as the European Union, the United Nations and the OECD have recognized the need to develop social and emotional skills in the education of citizens (Lozano-Pena et al, 2021). The teaching profession is considered one of the most emotionally demanding professions, which can affect mental health and well-being (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Emotional autonomy and improved social skills in teachers lead to increased resilience, reduce personal and professional burnout and contribute to general well-being (Jennings et al, 2021). Also, the training of these skills leads to the improvement of the teacher-student relationship and the climate and stimulation of learning in the classroom (Conroy, 2015). Social competence, as a predictor of occupational well-being, may constitute one important resource for the early-career adaptation of beginning teachers (Carstensen & Klusmann, 2021).

Welsh & Bierman (2001) outline social competence in terms of the social, emotional and cognitive skills and behaviors an individual needs for successful social adjustment. In outlining the social competence of young people and adults, theories and research (Argyle, 1998) converge towards the understanding that being socially competent means being integrated into a consolidated network of communication and cooperation, asserting yourself as a member of the professional group, to constructively manage intercultural, community, civic or political relationships and situations. Argyle (1998), who imposed the term social competence in social psychology, believes that this concept defines "patterns of social behavior that give socially competent individuals, in other words, capable of producing the desired effects on other individuals ". It is therefore noteworthy, the presentation of social competence as efficiency in social interaction.

Social competence is rendered as a construct whose characteristics are related to social action, the context and the goals pursued by individuals. In support of this idea, we appreciate the contribution of Sutton (1999, *apud* Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001) who outlines social competence as reflecting the success and efficiency of a person in achieving the proposed objectives in a given context. Crick & Dodge (1999, *apud* Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001) add to this definition the perspective of the judgment of peers and specify that a behavior is socially effective to the extent that the individual takes into account the rights and needs of others in the process of fulfilling his own goals.

2. Essential dimensions in the student's psychosocial profile

The social skills that build the social competence of individuals, according to the model proposed by Argyle (1998), are: communication, empathy, assertiveness, self-presentation, problem solving. A brief presentation of these components is necessary to outline the area of social competence and then establish how these components intertwine and influence each other. Verbal communication is at the centre of social competence, and non-verbal communication, expressiveness, gestures, social signals have a special role in the social competence model. Any conversation is closely related and supported by non-verbal signals. The professional competences of those who work in the educational environment and are based on social interaction necessarily include verbal competences, but also a high level of non-verbal expressiveness.

Social competence presupposes a close relationship between communication and empathy, the latter being particularly important, denoting the individual's ability to translate himself into inter-individual communication (Marcus, 1997). Pavelcu (1968, 36) believes that "the art of teaching assumes, in addition to the mastery of knowledge, the clarity and plasticity of the presentation fuelled by liveliness and scientific passion, the special ability to transpose into the situation of the listener, the pupil or the student". Teachers who exhibit the ability to identify and regulate emotions also express empathy when interacting with students, which also improves their teaching skills (Hen & Goroshit, 2016). According to the authors, the ability to manage emotions facilitates the manifestation of empathy and underlies the broader construct of social-emotional competence in teachers.

Assertiveness is the ability to influence without blaming or treating the other person as an adversary. Effective teachers make their voice heard, express their goals, expectations, implement a discipline and work plan, earn respect through direct communication and mutual trust (Canter, 2010). An empathic and assertive conduct from the teacher, a conduct that he has to be conscious and responsible, may be a trampoline for the student, helping to increase motivation for study and long-lasting learning (Anghel & Jitaru, 2019). For instance, assertive teachers would lead, organize, and structure the group situations, while listening to and empathizing with their students would increase students and teachers adaptation to the classrooms needs (Carstensen & Klusmann, 2021). The complex structure of social competence also includes problem-solving abilities, the problem-solving process being appreciated as a method of training social competence.

Protagonists of the conflict literature (Polat & Metin, 2012) claim that individuals use one or more coping strategies, such as: dominance, avoidance, compromise, obedience or cooperation. Cooperation involves an approach in which individuals engage for the mutual satisfaction of both parties, by investigating the diversity of solutions and collaborating for the common good. Empathy, openness to understanding others and an assertive attitude lead to positive interpersonal relationships and collaborative behaviour in conflict resolution. Social psychologists believe that self-presentation represents a special objective of social competence, important not only for the self-respect of the interactors, but also to constitute a model of behavior for others (Argyle, 1998). The lack of social competence is highlighted by social anxiety, deficiencies in the sphere of the ego or self-image, etc. Self-presentation is the behavior aimed at influencing the manner in which we are perceived by others. Disclosure of personal information is generally progressive, reciprocal and indispensable to any relationship, being a sign of trust.

Social competence, in a broad sense, is a prerequisite in the professional development of the teaching staff. The teacher's assertive behaviour in interacting with the student is reflected in his classroom management skills, such as collaboratively setting rules and expectations or offering alternatives and freedom of choice. Correlated with empathy, it increases the teacher's degree of adaptability, which allows him to take the student's perspective, understand the dynamics of conflict situations in the classroom, and develop a climate of constructive problem solving (Carstensen & Klusmann, 2021).

3. Research Methodology

The aim of our study was to outline the profile of the social skills of future teachers. We started from the hypothesis that in the profile of professional skills of polytechnic students, future teachers, we will identify the elements specified in the specialized literature, previously mentioned (communication, empathy, assertiveness, self-presentation, problem solving), and a high level of assertiveness will correlate with a high level of problem-solving competence. We also assumed that for some of these aspects of social competence, significant differences may appear due to variables such as gender, the maturity of the students, the profile of the graduated high school, the environment of origin.

To measure the dependent variables, we used as a working instrument the questionnaire "The Profile of Social and Emotional Competences/PSEC" which measuring 17 social and emotional competencies (e.g. emotional expression, empathy, ability to develop positive interpersonal relations, communication, assertiveness, etc.) (Tufeanu & Robu, 2013). A number of 121 students from the faculties of the Technical University "Gh. Asaghi", Iasi, of which: 72 participants are female and 49 male; a number of 55 participants graduated high school in 2021, and the other 66 graduated high school in previous generations; 57 participants are from rural areas and 64 are from urban areas; 74 participants are graduates of theoretical high school, 40 participants are graduates of technological high school 40, and 7 participants are graduates of vocational high school.

4. Findings

In order to outline the skills profile of future student teachers, we performed an analysis of the means using the statistical analysis programme SPSS11. The analysis of the averages allows us to have an overall view of the level of each of the five social skills on different variables, so that subsequent intervention decisions can be made where necessary.

| | | Communi- -cation | Assertive- -ness | Empathy | Self pre -sentation | Problem -solving |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Faculties | Hydrotechnics | 3.7833 | 4.2429 | 3.3000 | 3.0250 | 4.0000 |
| | Automation | 3.6954 | 3.6995 | 3.3586 | 3.3707 | 3.7586 |
| | Electrical, Energy | 3.2292 | 3.5714 | 3.5500 | 3.2813 | 3.5833 |
| | Chemical | 3.7619 | 3.8776 | 3.7714 | 3.2500 | 3.9286 |
| | Mechanics | 3.1364 | 3.5844 | 2.9636 | 2.8409 | 3.6061 |
| | Machine Constructions | 3.7292 | 3.6607 | 3.2500 | 3.4688 | 4.1042 |
| | Materials Science and Engineering | 3.4167 | 4.0357 | 3.2250 | 3.3125 | 3.4167 |
| | Constructions and plumbing | 4.1944 | 3.9286 | 4.2000 | 3.5417 | 4.0000 |
| | Industrial Design | 3.7222 | 4.0952 | 3.3556 | 3.2222 | 4.0741 |
| | Architecture | 2.8889 | 3.5714 | 3.6667 | 3.6667 | 3.1111 |
| Electronics | 3.5119 | 3.6837 | 3.0571 | 3.4107 | 3.6429 | |
| Environment of origin | Rural | 3.5146 | 3.7945 | 3.3018 | 3.1798 | 3.7164 |
| | Urban | 3.6068 | 3.7723 | 3.4219 | 3.3828 | 3.7943 |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Graduation year | 2021 | 3.5000 | 3.6442 | 3.3636 | 3.1136 | 3.7758 |
| | Another situation | 3.6162 | 3.8983 | 3.3667 | 3.4318 | 3.7424 |
| Type of high school | Theoretic | 3.5991 | 3.7529 | 3.3946 | 3.2466 | 3.7680 |
| | Technological | 3.5625 | 3.8643 | 3.3100 | 3.3625 | 3.7750 |
| | Vocational | 3.1905 | 3.6327 | 3.3714 | 3.2857 | 3.5476 |
| Gender | Feminine | 3.6343 | 3.8790 | 3.6139 | 3.3611 | 3.7870 |
| | Masculine | 3.4592 | 3.6414 | 3.0000 | 3.1786 | 3.7143 |

Although the averages are generally high, we can see that on the dimension "communication" the participants who are part of the faculty of architecture register the lowest scores. For example here, following more thorough analyses, improvement programmes can be proposed. To check if there are significant differences in the social skills given by the independent variables (gender, college, year of high school graduation, professional environment) we used the SPSS11 statistical analysis program, using the One Way Anova function. Thus, we identified significant differences for the assertiveness variable given gender and high school graduation year. In the case of the gender variable, the threshold of significance Sig = .02, girls having a slightly higher level of assertiveness (M=3.879) than boys (M=3.641). In any case, both of them give answers that describe all five variables at very high levels. For the "year of high school graduation" variable, the significance threshold Sig = .011 indicates significant differences between the participants who graduated high school in 2021 (M = 3.6442) and those who graduated high school in a period prior to 2021 (M = 3.8983). In other words, more mature participants with more experience are more assertive compared to their younger colleagues.

5. Conclusions

The study carried out by us brings data that support the need to develop social competence in future student teachers, capitalizing on the existing potential. An essential argument is that social skills represent a professional requirement for the teaching staff and at the same time, an element that ensures human satisfaction with life. Also, social competence is a personal resource for teachers' well-being and for strengthening their resilience (Mansfield et al, 2016). Moreover, our research has relevance in the context in which the crossing of the pandemic generated by COVID 19 has influenced the effectiveness of face-to-face communication for both students and teachers. People who have a low level of assertiveness are more likely to use social media as a means of communication to express their opinions in a way that meets their needs (Khairunnisa & Putri, 2019). We conclude that the activities of self-knowledge and personal development integrated in the psycho-pedagogical training program are essential for the development of self-evaluation skills and for applying the self-perceived potential of students in effective social interactions.

Note: The authors' contributions to the creation of the material are equal.

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