

THE OPINIONS OF AGRICULTURE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS REGARDING THE SKILLS PROFILE OF THE TEACHER

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Abstract: *The focus of this research paper is to identify/contour the prerequisite skills profile of any teacher in the view of undergraduate students majoring in Agriculture from the perspective of the multifarious roles a teacher should embrace in the context of the Romanian educational system. In the context of current educational environment and the skills approach, the professionalisation of the teacher becomes necessary and compulsory in order to obtain a quality instructive-educational process. The prospect of a modern educational system liable to innovation and curriculum reforms is also guaranteed by the quality of the teaching staff, whose competencies are formed and profiled alongside teaching and continuous formation experiences. During the study, we have construed the obtained information subsequent to applying a questionnaire to the students enrolled in the psycho-pedagogic module programme. The results regarding the positive qualities of the ideal teacher and the roles entailed by him/her in school were interpreted by the students through brainstorming. Thus, the most important knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that make up the ideal teacher were elicited by the students. As a consequence, the skills profile of the teacher was depicted, the study contributing to the students' attaching value to the importance of professional training and identification of personal needs in the psycho-pedagogic formation.*

Key words: *professional competences, teacher professionalization, education quality*

INTRODUCTION

To identify a teacher's competence profile such as seen by the undergraduates of Romanian agricultural higher education, we need to clarify a few concepts necessary to our approach. First, we define teacher's professionalization as "a process of continuous training of skills and competences in a given field based on the acquisition of a system of academic and practical knowledge, a process controlled by a model of the profession" (Păun, in Gliga, 2002, 21). This model of the teaching profession developed based on a set of knowledge and competences making up professional standards is completed systematically and it leads to what the specialists in the field call "expert teacher". Thus, these competences should be interpreted again and again to ensure efficacy and efficiency in the teaching practice. According to the Law of Education No. 1/2011, "The professional development of the teaching, management, guidance, and control staff as well as their professional conversion rely on the professional standards of the teaching profession." (art. 244, par. 5)

Art. 4 of the same Law states, "Professional education and training of the children, young people and adults aim at developing competences – a multifunctional transferable system of knowledge, skills and aptitudes necessary to:

- a) accomplish and develop personally by reaching one's own goals in life according to the interests and aspirations of each and everyone and to the wish to learn lifelong;
- b) integrate socially and participate actively in social life;
- c) get a job and participate in the functioning and development of sustainable economy;

- d) develop an idea of life based on humane and scientific values, on national and international cultures, and on inter-cultural dialogue;
- e) educate in the spirit of dignity, tolerance, and respect for the fundamental human rights and freedom;
- f) cultivate one's sensitivity towards the most important human issues, moral-civic values, and respect for nature and for the natural, social, and cultural environment."

This allows us to identify the value of competences in the socio-professional life of the students we educate and train.

We, thus, identify the concept of "competence" which, according to Voiculescu (2012) is closer to that of "responsibility" than to that of one's "ability" to achieve something. If we refer strictly to a person from a professional perspective then, according to Voiculescu, competence is a "person's attribute" that needs to prove knowledge and abilities that are necessary to achieve tasks specific to a certain field and, implicitly, practice a certain profession. According to Le Boterf (2006, in Voiculescu, 2012), the decisive benchmark in defining "competence" is action. Being competent does not mean having competences. The definition of "competence" we subscribe for here is, according to Voiculescu, "individual or collective feature able to mobilise in an effective manner a range of knowledge, abilities, and behavioural attitudes." (Voiculescu, 2012, p.13) The role of a teacher as mentioned in literature is multiple: some authors (Neacsu, 2002, in Potolea et al., 2008) mentions the roles of "instructor", "actor", "mediator facilitator", "moderator", "institutional authority", "confessor", "protector", "councillor and therapist", "message conveyer", "leader of opinion", "professional manager". Starting from these multiple roles of a teacher in Romanian educational system, we have identified the competences of a teacher.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To carry out the present study, we used the questionnaire survey. The questionnaire had five response variants on the Likert Scale: "Total disagreement", "Partial disagreement", "None", "Partial agreement", and "Total agreement". It contained 38 items grouped into five categories and it was applied to 61 undergraduates of the Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michael I of Romania" from Timisoara, Romania in the academic year 2013-2014. The respondents were enrolled in the 1st Level Psycho-pedagogical Course and their major was Forestry (1st and 2nd years), Landscaping (1st, 2nd, and 3rd years), Genetic engineering (1st and 2nd years), Veterinary medicine (2nd and 3rd years), Agriculture (1st and 2nd years), and Biotechnologies (3rd year).

Our instrument consisted of a questionnaire based on the roles attributed by the ANC and that make up the Occupational Standard – Teacher (primary and secondary schools). According to this standard, teachers are involved in the teaching process, in class management, in school counselling, in professional development, in institutional development, in social and educational partnerships, and in the design of a teacher's conduct model. Order No. 5660/2004 states the teacher's general standards: methodological, communicational and relational, evaluative, psycho-social, technical and technological, and career management.

At the end of the questionnaire, the undergraduates were asked to mention in the order of importance the main three features of a good teacher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Starting from the multitude of roles of a good teacher (ANC, 2012, Occupational standard: Teacher – primary and secondary education) and from Order No. 5660/2004 which states the teacher's general standards: methodological, communicational and relational,

evaluative, psycho-social, technical and technological, and career management we grouped our items into five categories defining the competences of a teacher.

The first category of items (Q1-Q8) describes methodological competences, evaluation competences, and the roles of a teacher in the teaching process. Thus, analysing the undergraduates' responses, we can see that most respondents (55, i.e. 90.24%) claimed they "Totally agree" with item Q5 (evaluation competence) according to which a teacher should "evaluate and grade students fairly". Item Q7 ranked second: 78.05% of the respondents claimed "a good teacher should advance innovative solutions for the teaching process". Item Q6 ranked third: 73.17% of the respondents agreed that "a teacher should manage efficiently the factors involved in the teaching process".

Item Q1 ("a teacher should know and select specific content units") shared 68.29% of the students.

Item Q8 ("a teacher should enhance critical thinking in his/her students") and item Q4 ("a teacher should develop proper teaching aids depending on the goal and on individual and group features") reached both 65.85%. As for the responses ranking under "Partial agreement", item Q3 ("a teacher should manage efficiently the teaching process based on the students' learning experience in other contexts") and item Q4 ("a teacher should develop evaluation tools depending on the teaching-learning activities and on individual and group features") shared both 34.14% of the respondents.

Three undergraduates "Partially disagreed" with item Q8 ("a teacher should enhance critical thinking in his/her students"), while no undergraduate "Totally disagreed" with any of the items in the first category.

The second category of items (Q9-Q15) focused on class management competences and on communication and relational competences.

The analysis of the responses to the items Q9-Q15 related to communication and relation competences and to class management competences shows that most students (95.12%) "Totally agreed" with item Q10 ("a teacher should well communicate with his/her students"), which ranks communication competence first in this category.

Item Q9 ("a teacher should be a good organiser and leader of the school group") shared 78.05% of the respondents in "Total agreement", while item Q12 ("a teacher should get involved in ensuring a climate based on cooperation and trust") ranked third, with 70.73%.

Thirty-four point 14 percent of the respondents "Partially agree" with item Q14 ("a teacher should be empathic with and supportive of his/her students"); Q11 ("a teacher should communicate and cooperate with the students' parents, with the school and the community of the school") ranked second sharing 29.27% (18 students) of the respondents.

As for the percentage of undergraduates who pointed to the variant "None", it reached 9.76%, equal to the item Q13 ("a teacher should prove true knowledge of all communication types: horizontal/vertical, multiple, diversified, and specific"), to the item Q14 ("a teacher should be empathic with and supportive of his/her students"), and to the item Q15 ("a teacher should manage and solve efficiently educational crises"). As for the items Q11 ("a teacher should communicate and cooperate with the students' parents, with the school and the community of the school") and Q14 ("a teacher should be empathic with and supportive of his/her students"), 4.88% of the respondents "Totally disagreed" with them.

The third category of items (Q16-Q23) described psycho-social competences and the roles of a teacher in social and educational partnerships, and in school counselling, competences necessary for an efficient and high-quality teaching-learning process. Item Q16 ("a teacher should help his/her students adapt quickly to social change") and item Q19 ("a teacher should identify the student's learning needs and difficulties") ranked first: 65.86% of

the respondents “Totally agreed” with them. Item Q20 (“a teacher should carry out counselling activities assisting his/her student’s development”) and item Q22 (“a teacher should develop psycho-moral behaviour in his/her students”) ranked second with 63.41% of the undergraduates “Totally agreeing” with them. Item Q21 (“a teacher should valorise methods and techniques meant to better know and activate students”) ranked third with 60.98% of the respondents “totally agreeing” with it. Item Q23 (“a teacher should carry out partnership activities”) totalled 22 undergraduates who “Totally agreed” and 22 undergraduates who “Partially agreed” with it, i.e. 36.58% of the respondents. Another 22 undergraduates “Partially agreed” with item Q18 (“a teacher should correlate labour market trends and the teaching-learning process”) and item Q23 (“a teacher should carry out partnership activities between school, family, and school community”). A number of 12 undergraduates had a neuter position (“None”) toward item Q17 (“a teacher should develop a desirable socio-professional behaviour in his/her students”), i.e. 19.51% of the respondents. Item Q18 (“a teacher should correlate labour market trends and the teaching-learning process”) gathered the largest number of undergraduates in “Partial disagreement”. Items Q21 (“a teacher should valorise methods and techniques meant to better know and activate students”) and Q22 (“a teacher should develop psycho-moral behaviour in his/her students”) gathered each only 2 undergraduates in “Total disagreement”.

The fourth category of items (Q24-Q27) described the range of technical and technological competences necessary for a proper teaching-learning process. Most undergraduates (65.85%) “Totally agreed” with the item Q25 (“a teacher should experiment action schemes aimed at acquiring/improving practical and motor skills”), followed by the item Q24 (“a teacher should use digital aids in the teaching-learning process”) with 60.98% of the respondents and item Q26 (“a teacher should develop teaching aids”) with 58.54% of the respondents. The largest number of undergraduates (21) in “Partial agreement” concerned item Q27 (“a teacher should design and carry out technical activities”), i.e. 34.14% of the respondents. Seven undergraduates marked “None” in the items Q25 (“a teacher should experiment action schemes aimed at acquiring/improving practical and motor skills”) and Q27 (“a teacher should design and carry out technical activities”), i.e. 12.20% of the respondents. Most students “Partially disagreeing” were in the item Q24 (“a teacher should use digital aids in the teaching-learning process”), i.e. 7.31% of the respondents. Two undergraduates “Totally disagreed” with item Q25 (“a teacher should experiment action schemes aimed at acquiring/improving practical and motor skills”) and item Q26 (“a teacher should develop teaching aids”), i.e. 2.44% of the respondents.

The fifth category of items (Q28-Q38) describes the range of competences in career management, and in personal development and conduct model of a good teacher. Most students “Totally agreed” with item Q33 (“a teacher should permanently update knowledge”), i.e. 80.49% of the respondents; item Q31 (“a teacher should observe the deontological standards of his/her profession”) ranked second, with 44 undergraduates, i.e. 70.73%; item Q28 (“a teacher should improve professionally on a continuous basis”), item Q32 (“a teacher should practice specific behaviour in competitive and examination situations”), item Q36 (“a teacher should be able to self-assess his/her own activity and take efficient measures to remedy deficiencies and to optimise approaches”), and item Q38 (“a teacher should stimulate his/her students to adopt pro-social behaviour and civic involvement”) ranked third with 68.29% of the total respondents. The largest share of undergraduates, 31.14%, “partially agreed” with item Q37 (“a teacher should promote a system of values specific to a democratic society”), followed by item Q29 (“a teacher should use psycho-behavioural self-control techniques”) with 31.70% of the total respondents. The lowest percentage of undergraduates in “Partial agreement” (14.63%)

was in the item Q33 (“a teacher should permanently update knowledge”). The highest percentage of “None” was in the item Q34 (“a teacher should involve docimologically: examiner/examined, competitor/surveillant, etc.”), i.e. 17.07% of the respondents. The undergraduates who were in “Total agreement” were in item Q32 (“a teacher should practice specific behaviour in competitive and examination situations”) and in item Q37 (“a teacher should promote a system of values specific to a democratic society”), i.e. 2.44 of the total respondents.

At the end of the questionnaire, the undergraduates were asked to indicate the most important three features of a good teacher. The undergraduates ranked first “the ability of evaluating and grading students fairly”, followed by “the concern for continuous professional improvement”. Other responses sharing the first rank concerned “the efficient management of the teaching process” and “the very good communication with the students”. Other responses stated that a teacher should show “empathy” and “creativity”, to give “good grades”, to be “a moral example”, etc.

Communication competence ranked second: most undergraduates stated that “a teacher should communicate very well with his/her students”; it was followed by the evaluation competence (“a teacher should have the ability of evaluating and grading students fairly” and by the claim that “a teacher should valorise methods and techniques meant to better know and activate students”. Other undergraduates point to the fact that a teacher should be “understanding”, “malleable”, “well trained professionally”, “serious”, etc.

Four statements ranked third from the point of view of the features of a teacher: thus, a good teacher should “ensure a climate based on cooperation and trust”, “update his/her knowledge on a continuous basis”, “communicate very well with his/her students”, “be able to identify student’s learning needs and difficulties”, “be a good friend”, “be creative”, “be punctual”, “be empathic”, “use digital aids in the teaching process”, “be sociable”, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

The processing of the undergraduates’ responses to our questionnaire concerning their opinions on the teacher’s competences allowed us to identify those competences.

Analysing and correlating the responses of the undergraduates in agricultural higher education who “Totally agreed” and/or “Partially agreed” with the items in the questionnaire and identifying the highest percentage of each item of the five categories analysed, we could identify as ranking first among undergraduates’ preferences and opinions the communication competence (“a teacher should be a good communicator in his/her relationship with his/her students”), followed by the evaluation competence (“a teacher should evaluate and grade students fairly”), by the career management competence (“a teacher should permanently update knowledge”) and deontological competence (“a teacher should observe the deontological standards of his/her profession”); then come the methodological competence (“a good teacher should advance innovative solutions for the teaching process”) and the management competence (“a teacher should manage efficiently the factors involved in the teaching process”).

Last come psycho-social competences that help students adapt quickly to social change and identify the student’s learning needs and difficulties and technical competences related to the experiencing of action schemes playing a role in the acquisition and improvement of practical and motor skills. Corroborated with the features mentioned by the undergraduates at the end of the questionnaire, these competences make up the competence profile of a good teacher or of the ideal teacher in undergraduates’ opinion.

Results concerning the features of an ideal teacher and the role he/she plays in school were analysed by the undergraduates through brainstorming thus contributing to the valorisation of the importance of the professional training and to the identification of their own needs for psycho-pedagogical training.

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