

THE COMPETENCE - THE KEY CONCEPT OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

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Abstract: *Being competent means being able to mobilize an integrated resource ensemble, with the purpose of solving problem situations. In this context, the competence supposes an original answer to a situation, demanding an efficient answer and being characterized by an integrated answer. In Romania, according to the National Education Law no.1./2011, with ulterior changes and additions, „competence represents the proven capacity to select, combine and adequately utilize knowledge, abilities and other acquisitions consisting in values and attitudes, for the successful solving of a certain working or learning situation category, as well as for the professional or personal development in efficacy and efficiency conditions”.*

Key words: *competence; European Qualification Framework (EQF); efficacy; efficiency*

INTRODUCTION

Competence is defined in dictionaries as:

- an ensemble of theoretic and practical information (Noul dicționar al limbii române, 2002);
- someone's capacity to issue an opinion regarding a problem, to do something (Marele dicționar de neologisme, 2008);
- someone's capacity to issue an opinion regarding an object, on grounds of a thorough knowledge with regards to the issue in question; the capacity of an authority, a clerk etc. to carry out certain attributions (Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, 2012).

“Competence” is a polysemantic term, whose meanings changes depending on the field and context it is used in. The term's meanings diversified as it penetrated areas like psychology, psycholinguistics, sociology, pedagogy.

In the educational environment, most actors believe the term refers to:

- a stable ensemble of knowledge and skills, behaviours, procedures, reasoning types which can be applied without learning new things (DE MONTMOLLIN, 1984);
 - the capacity to resolve issues in an efficient way, in a given context (SANDRA MICHEL, 1993);
 - an individual's capacity to solve a given task, which requires a high amount of operations (BRIEN, 1997);
 - the capacity to efficiently act in a situation family, based on necessary knowledge and optimal time mobilization (PERRENOUD, 1999);
- mobilization or activation of various knowledge, in a given situation; competence means to recognize the fact that you know how to act (LE BOTERF, 2000);
- the integrated knowledge, skills and attitude ensemble, which allows the individual to adapt to situations (DELORY, 2002).

Today, the competence is considered to be a contextualization of acquisitions (knowledge, skills, abilities), used in a certain context (PERRENOUD, 1999; LE BOTERF, 1999; ROEGIERS, 2000; DE KETELE, 2005).

DISCUSSIONS

Competence is one of the key concepts of the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

EQF is a reference framework which establishes the comparability and compatibility of national education and formation systems, playing the role of an instrument which renders qualifications transparent and easy to understand in various European countries. As a result, an independent qualification system network, but with correspondences, at a national and European level, which facilitates comparison and qualification transfer between countries, systems and institutions.

The main EQF objectives are:

- ✓ *promotion of citizen mobility;*
- ✓ *facilitating lifelong learning.*

Lifelong learning is based on eight key competences:

- 1) Communication in the mother tongue;
- 2) Communication in foreign languages;
- 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- 4) Digital competence;
- 5) Learning to learn;
- 6) Social and civic competences;
- 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- 8) Cultural awareness and expression (figure1).

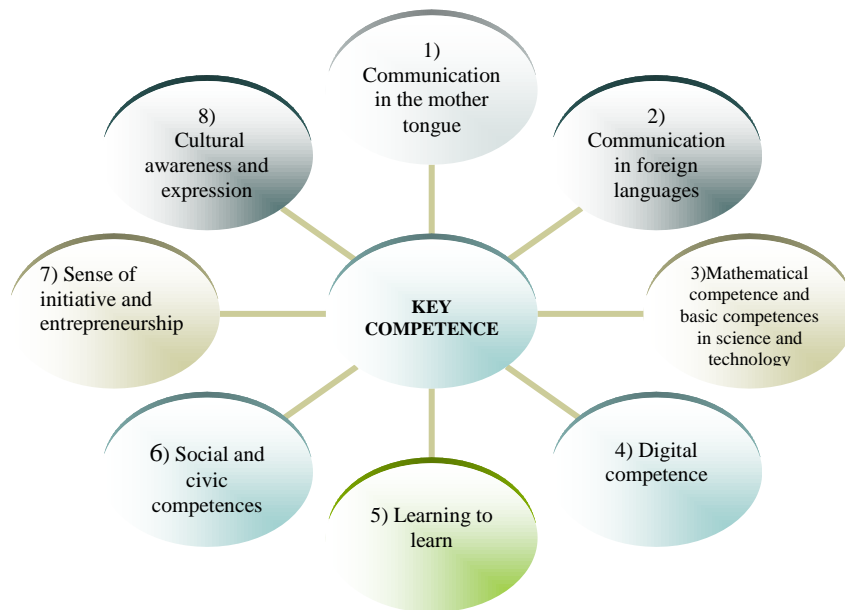


Figure 1. Key competences for lifelong learning

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council European Union from 23.04.2008 on setting EQF for lifelong learning, published in the Official European Union Journal on 06.05.2008, operates with the following terms (table 1):

Table 1.

The European Qualification Framework (EQF) - definitions

Qualification	means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.
National qualifications system	means all aspects of a Member State's activity related to the recognition of learning and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labor market and civil society. This includes the development and implementation of institutional arrangements and processes relating to quality assurance, assessment and the award of qualifications. A national qualifications system may be composed of several subsystems and may include a national qualifications framework.
National qualifications framework	means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labor market and civil society.
Sector	means a grouping of professional activities on the basis of their main economic function, product, service or technology.
International sectoral organization	means an association of national organizations, including, for example, employers and professional bodies, which represents the interests of national sectors.
Learning outcomes	means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
Knowledge	means the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual
Skills	means the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).
Competence	means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. In the context of the European Qualifications Framework, competence is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Source: The Official European Union Journal on 06.05.2008

Because it promotes lifelong learning, EQF comprises a set of reference elements, systematized in a hierarchic structure on *eight levels*, defined through learning results, correlated with already existing qualifications. Each reference level is described with the help of level descriptors, which highlights the relevant learning result progression from one level to the other, in every qualification system. EQF accentuates on learning results, which are divided into three categories: knowledge, skills, competence (table 2).

Table 2.

Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualification Framework (EQF)

EQF Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
	In the context of EQF, knowledge is described as <i>theoretical and/or factual</i> .	In the context of EQF, skills are described as: <i>cognitive</i> (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and <i>practical</i> (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).	In the context of EQF, competence is described in terms of <i>responsibility and autonomy</i> .
Level 1	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
Level 2	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
Level 3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems
Level 4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
Level 5	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others
Level 6	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
Level 7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams
Level 8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new

		and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice	ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research
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CONCLUSIONS

In Romania, according to the National Education Law no.1./2011, with ulterior changes and additions, „competence represents the proven capacity to select, combine and adequately utilize knowledge, abilities and other acquisitions consisting in values and attitudes, for the successful solving of a certain working or learning situation category, as well as for the professional or personal development in efficacy and efficiency conditions”.

Competence:

- means to mobilize and to utilize a knowledge ensemble in real life situations;
- presumes to know to act;
- the noticeable manifestation of a competence is performance;
- may be observed in a precise situation and in a given context;
- as an individual's attribute, is formed and manifested through the interaction with others;
- the action is the bench-mark which indicates the difference between being competent and having competences.

From the anterior discussions, one can infer that there are numerous advantages in using the European Qualification Framework (EQF). Thus:

- it allows the increase of lifelong learning access and participation;
- it promotes chance equality in knowledge based society;
- for the learners, it facilitates the description of the competence level in other countries, supporting mobility on the European labour market;
- it applies quality insurance principles in education and formation;
- it supports persons with a working rich experience by validating non-formal and informal learning;
- it supports individual users and educational and formation service providers by accentuating the transparency of qualifications granted outside national systems.

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