

THE EDUCATIONAL CAREER CHOICE: A SWOT ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The educational career is a vocational one, those who choose to pursue such a career have certain personality traits and abilities. The skills and competencies of the teacher is often unknown by those who choose this profession. This study examined the main skills profiles for the teaching profession and compared with self - perceived profiles of prospective teachers. Also, the study aims to identify the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to achieve the educational competency. In order to assess the study variables a SWOT analysis was administrated to 60 students of West University of Timisoara, specialized in educational sciences. Also, the students were asked to list their perceived strong and weak points in relation to the educational career. Results revealed that the students perceived mainly the internal factors who influence the competence achievement, their personal strengths and weaknesses, and less the external ones, the opportunities and threats. In their competency profile they focus more on personality traits and motivational characteristics and less on knowledge and cognitive competencies.

Keywords: *educational career, skills and competencies of the teacher, SWOT analysis*

1. Introduction

To teach and care for children is a vocational choice for a career. Only a person who is orientated in life by care and helping other can make such a career choice. A teacher must be student-centred, caring and understanding for the student`s needs, but also a good manager, a professional in assistive technologies and an excellent communicator. The teaching profession involves a series of very complex responsibilities, roles, goals, skills and qualities, often traced in literature as pedagogical talent or teaching vocation. A vocation is an occupation to which a person is specially drawn and for which she is suited. A profession is a vocation founded upon specialized educational training and is characterized by professional standards. A vocation may become profession only if it is followed by professional training and certification and thus acquire teaching skills. This study examined the main skills profiles for the teaching profession and compared with auto - perceived profiles of prospective teachers.

Jinga (2001) considers the professional competence of teachers a set of cognitive, affective, motivational and managerial personality traits who interact with educator`s personality, giving its qualities necessary for a teaching that ensures benefits for projected goals.

Kulshrestha and Pandey stipulate that “There are two distinct meanings of „competence in education. From a theoretical point of view, competence is understood as a cognitive structure that facilitates specified behaviors. From an operational point of view, competence seems to cover a broad range of higher order skills and behaviors that represent the ability to deal with complex, unpredictable situations. This operational definition includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, metacognition and strategic thinking, and presupposes conscious and intentional decision making” (Westera, 2001 apud. Kulshrestha and Pandey, 2013, p. 30).

W. Strykowski (2003, apud. Ciechanowska, 2010, p. 109-110), lists following types of competence

- “factual competence;
- psychological pedagogical competence;
- diagnostic competence, connected with knowing the pupil and their environment;
- planning and

projecting competence; • didactic methodological competence; • communicative competence • competence in media and technology; • competence connected with pupil achievement control and evaluation, as well as qualitative assessment of the school work; • competence connected with planning and assessment of school programs and schoolbooks; • self educating competence, connected with professional development”

The core competencies of the teaching profession, drawn up by CNFP in 2007, comprises five general skills: Facilitating innovative teaching and learning in student centred approach, evaluation and monitoring of teaching and learning performance, curriculum planning and implementation schedules, training materials and teaching methods; Forming partnerships within and outside the school community; Involvement in professional and personal development.

V. Chiş (2005) proposed new sets of key competence to be formed to future teachers in addition to those mentioned by classical pedagogy. In classical pedagogy the core competencies mentioned were transmission, repetition and persuasion. In the modern pedagogy the new competencies that must be formed are interactivity, communication, sociability and alternative strategies.

Kulshrestha and Pandey listed the factors who contribute to the quality of teaching, such as “the professional competence of the teacher, which includes subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of teaching and learning, curricular knowledge, teaching experience, and certification status (Shulman, 1986, Grossman, 1995, Westera, 2001, apud. Kulshrestha and Pandey, 2013, p. 30).

Liakopoulou (2011) classifies the qualities and skills which are included in a “good teacher” competency are personality traits, attitudes and beliefs and pedagogical skills and knowledge. The personality traits, attitudes and beliefs listed by the author are “flexibility in terms of the appearance of students, a sense of humor, a sense of fairness, patience, enthusiasm, creativity, care and interest in the students (Malikow 2005, Harslett et al. 2000 apud. Liakopoulou 2011, p. 67). “These also include a teacher’s attitudes and beliefs on teaching, learning, his role, all of which affect the way he chooses, evaluates and comprehends the knowledge acquired, as well as the way he benefits from this knowledge in practice, as this very practice is shaped by that knowledge”(Feiman-Nemser 1990, Schön 1983, Zeichner & Listo Knowledge of learners 1996 apud. Liakopoulou 2011, p.67). The knowledge fields considered necessary prerequisite for every teacher, which form the basic part of “professional knowledge” in Liakopoulou (2011) opinion are| subject knowledge, teaching methodology, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of contexts, and knowledge of self.

The theoretical model of teaching competence we propose and we rely on the interpretation of experimental results is as follows:

1. The professional competence of the teacher, subject knowledge, and methodological knowledge
2. Teaching experience
3. Pedagogical attitudes toward others (students, parents, staff, community): interpersonal skills, communicative skills, empathy, respect, sense of humor, sense of fairness, patience, enthusiasm, creativity Pedagogical attitudes toward profession:

responsibility, perseverance, highly perceived autoefficacy, organizational skills, Pedagogical attitudes toward self: high self esteem, need for personal development

4. Competence in media and technology.

Specific aims

Given the important role professional competence in the teaching career, we sought to assess the self-perception of professional competence of the prospective teachers and compare to the theoretical model of the concept. We address this specific aims:

- Assess the self-perception of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the prospective teachers in relation to the educational career.
- Assess the self-perception of strong and weak points in relation with the profession of the prospective teachers.
- Determine the main, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the prospective teachers in relation to the educational career.
- Compare the competence profile obtained with the theoretical one.

2. Research hypothesis

We presume that:

1. The prospective teachers focused mainly on the internal factors who assure the reach of professional competence (strengths and weaknesses).
2. The prospective teachers perceived more factors helpful to achieving the objective than harmful ones.
3. The main internal factor they perceived as influential for reaching professional competence are the strengths.
4. The main external factor they perceived as influential for reaching professional competence are the opportunities.
5. The prospective teachers perceived their strong points in professional competence mainly as personality traits (attitudes toward teaching, self and others).
6. The prospective teachers perceived their weaknesses in professional competence mainly as professional knowledge and lack of practical experience.

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

In the research group are included 60 students from West University Timisoara specialized in educational sciences, aged between 18 and 56years old, with a mean age of 24.8. Lot gender distribution reveals 59 women and 1 man. The participants are from Special Education, General pedagogy and preschool and primary teaching field. They are students in the first and second year of studies. .

4.2 Instruments

To assess the self-perception of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the prospective teachers in relation to the educational career a SWOT analysis was administrated. The students were asked to list as many as they want of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in relation to the educational career and the achievement of professional competence in teaching. Also, they were asked to list as many as they want

strong (on which they can rely upon as teachers) and weak points (whom they want to improve in order to be a good, competent teacher).

5. Results

In order to test null hypothesis 1, that states that “the prospective teachers do not focused mainly on the internal factors who assure the reach of professional competence (strengths and weaknesses)” we calculated the frequencies of the internal factors listed by the students (strengths and weaknesses) and the frequencies of the external ones (opportunities and threats)

Table 1: The frequencies of the internal and external factors listed by the students

	Frequency	Percent %
Internal factors	329	54
External factors	276	45
Total	605	100

In table 1 are presented the frequencies of the internal and external factors listed by the students. The results shows that the majority of the factors (54%) who have an impact on reaching the professional competence listed by students are internal and only 45 % are external. The null hypothesis 1 was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

In order to test null hypothesis 2, that states that “the prospective teachers do not perceived more factors helpful to achieving the objective then harmful ones” we calculated the frequencies of the helpful (strengths and opportunities) and harmful (weaknesses and threats) factors listed by the students

Table 2: The frequencies of the helpful and harmful factors listed by the students

	Frequency	Percent %
Helpful to achieving the objective	361	60
Harmful to achieving the objective	244	40
Total	605	100

In table 2 are presented the frequencies of the helpful and harmful factors listed by the students. The results shows that majority of the factors (60%) who have an impact on reaching the professional competence listed by students are helpful and only 40% are harmful. The null hypothesis 2 was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

In order to test null hypothesis 3, that states that “the main internal factor the students perceived as influential for reaching professional competence are not the strengths” we calculated the frequencies of the internal factors listed by the students (strengths and weaknesses)

Table 3: The frequencies of the internal factors listed by the students

Internal factors		
	Frequency	Percent %
Strengths	197	60
Weaknesses	132	40
Total	329	100

In table 3 are presented the frequencies of the internal and external factors listed by the students. The results shows that the majority of the internal factors (60%) listed by students are strengths, and only 40 % are weaknesses. The null hypothesis 3 was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

Table 4: The paired sample t test for strengths vs. weaknesses

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Strength total – Weaknesses total	.53333	3.28049	.42351	1.259	59	.213

In table 4 is presented the paired sample t test for strengths versus weaknesses as internal factors, the result indicate that the strengths are more valued than the weaknesses ($t=2.63$ at $p>0.05$), but not significantly.

Table 5: The frequencies of strengths listed by students

Strengths								
Pedagogical attitudes toward others			Pedagogical attitudes toward profession			Pedagogical attitudes toward self		
Values	Frequency	Percent %	Values	Frequency	Percent	Values	Frequency	Percent
Sincerity	8	11	Responsibility	3	3	Self improvement	2	10
Sociability	22	34	Interest	20	19	Self confidence	10	45
Courtesy	4	6	Ambition	48	47	Optimism	10	45
Patience	26	37	Punctuality	12	11			
Kindness	4	6	Creativity	8	7			
Loyalty	4	6	Perseverance	8	7			
Cooperative	2	2	Organization	6	6			
Total	70	100		105	100		22	100

The personal strengths perceived by students refer only to pedagogical attitudes (toward others, profession and self). The most frequent personal attitudes toward others are

patience (37%) and sociability (34%). The most frequent personal attitudes toward profession are ambition (47%) and interest (11%). The most frequent personal attitudes toward self are self confidence (45%) and optimism (45%).

Table 6: The frequencies of weaknesses listed by students

Weaknesses								
Pedagogical attitudes toward others			Pedagogical attitudes toward profession			Pedagogical attitudes toward self		
Values	Frequency	Percent %	Values	Frequency	Percent	Values	Frequency	Percent
Critic	6	60	Punctuality	2	4	Emotional balance	24	32
Irascibility	2	20	Lack of focus	4	8	Pessimism	12	17
Withdrawal	2	20	Negligence	18	38	Self esteem	16	22
			Disorganization	12	26	Fear of failure	22	29
			Procastination	6	12			
Total	10	100		48			74	100

The personal weaknesses perceived by students refer only to pedagogical attitudes (toward others, profession and self). The most frequent personal attitudes toward others considered weakness is criticism (60%) The most frequent personal attitudes toward profession are negligence (38%) and disorganization (26%). The most frequent personal attitudes toward self considered as weakness are poor emotional balance (32%) and fear of failure (29%).

In order to test null hypothesis 4, that states that “the main external factor they perceived as influential for reaching professional competence are not the opportunities” we calculated the frequencies of the external factors listed by the students (opportunities and threats)

Table 7: The frequencies of the external factors listed by the students

External factors		
	Frequency	Percent %
Opportunities	164	60
Threats	112	40
Total	276	100

In table 7 are presented the frequencies of the external factors listed by the students. The results shows that majority of the external factors (60%) listed by students are opportunities, and only 40 % are threats. The null hypothesis 4 was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

Table 8: The frequencies of opportunities listed by students

Opportunities		
Values	Frequency	Percent %
Voluntariate	28	17
Pedagogical practice	12	7
Extracurricular activities	2	1
Good institutional communication	2	1
Pedagogical staff	22	13
Family	8	4
Good university program	18	10
Interesting subjects	14	8
Library	16	9
Teaching facilities	4	2
United team of colleagues	6	3
Prestigious university	14	8
Transdisciplinary development	2	1
Scholarships aboard	6	3
Projects	8	4
Total	164	100

The most frequent opportunities considered to have a positive impact on reaching professional competence are voluntariate (17%), pedagogical staff (13%) and good university program (10%)

Table 9: The frequencies of threats listed by students

Threats		
Values	Frequency	Percent %
Difficult courses	12	10
Lack of jobs	16	14
Low educational requirements	2	1
Time management	38	33
Competition	16	14
Entourage	16	14
Family	8	7
Commute	8	7
Financial issues	14	12
Social transformation	4	3
Insufficient professional training	2	1
Total	112	100

The most frequent threats considered to have a negative impact on reaching professional competence are time management (33%), lack of jobs, competition and entourage (14%)

In order to test null hypothesis 5 who stipulates that “the prospective teachers perceived their strong points in professional competence mainly as personality traits (attitudes toward teaching, self and others)” we calculated the paired sample t test for perceived strengths

Table 10: The paired sample t test for the components of perceived strengths

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Strengths professional knowledge – strengths practical experience	-.33333	1.52567	.19696	-1.692	59	.096
Pair 2	Strengths professional knowledge – strengths attitudes	-11.20000	1.73498	.22399	-50.003	59	.000
Pair 3	Strengths practical experience – strengths attitudes	-10.86667	1.99548	.25761	-42.182	59	.000

In table 10 is presented the paired sample t test for the components of perceived strengths, the result indicate that the most valued strength in reaching professional competence are the personality traits, the attitudes, then the practical experience and last the professional knowledge. The null hypothesis 5 was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

In order to test null hypothesis 6 who stipulates that “the prospective teachers do not perceived their weaknesses in professional competence mainly as professional knowledge and lack of practical experience” we calculated the paired sample t test for perceived weaknesses

Table 11: The paired sample t test for the components of perceived weaknesses

Pair 2	Weaknesses professional knowledge – weaknesses attitudes	.20000	.93519	.12073	1.657	59	.103
Pair 3	Weaknesses practical experience – Weaknesses attitudes	.20000	.93519	.12073	1.657	59	.103

In table 11 is presented the paired sample t test for the components of perceived weakness, the result indicate that the most frequent weaknesses who stands in front of reaching professional competence are the professional knowledge the practical experience and the last the attitudes. The null hypothesis 6 was invalid, and the research hypothesis does confirm.

1. Conclusions

This research focused on investigating the self-perception of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the prospective teachers in relation to the educational career. We aimed to determine the needs of the students in reaching professional competence in teaching.

The results substantiate that the majority of the factors who have an impact on reaching the professional competence listed by students are internal (strengths and weaknesses). The majority of the internal factors listed by students are strengths (60%), and only 40 % are weaknesses.

The results show that the prospective teachers perceived more factors helpful to achieving the objective than harmful ones and the main internal factor the students perceived as influential for reaching professional competence are the strengths.

The personal strengths perceived by students refer only to pedagogical attitudes (toward others, profession and self). The most frequent personal attitudes toward others are patience and sociability. The most frequent personal attitudes toward profession are ambition and interest. The most frequent personal attitudes toward self are self confidence and optimism.

The personal weaknesses perceived by students also refer only to pedagogical attitudes (toward others, profession and self). The most frequent personal attitudes toward others considered weakness is criticism. The most frequent personal attitudes toward profession are negligence and disorganization. The most frequent personal attitudes toward self considered as weakness are poor emotional balance and fear of failure.

SWOT ANALYSIS FOR REACHING PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING

Strengths			Weaknesses		
Pedagogical attitudes toward others	Pedagogical attitudes toward profession	Pedagogical attitudes toward self	Pedagogical attitudes toward others	Pedagogical attitudes toward profession	Pedagogical attitudes toward self
Sincerity	Responsibility	Self improvement	Critic	Punctuality	Emotional balance
Sociability	Interest	Self confidence	Irascibility	Lack of focus	Pessimism
Courtesy	Ambition	Optimism	Withdrawal	Negligence	Self esteem
Patience	Punctuality			Disorganization	Fear of failure
Kindness	Creativity			Procastination	
Loyalty	Perseverance			Fatigue	
Cooperative	Organization				
Opportunities			Threats		
Voluntariate			Difficult courses		
Pedagogical practice			Lack of jobs		
Extracurricular activities			Low educational requirements		
Good institutional communication			Time management		
Pedagogical staff			Competition		
Family			Entourage		
Good university program			Family		
Interesting subjects			Commute		
Library			Financial issues		

Teaching facilities	Social transformation
United team of colleagues	Insufficient professional training
Prestigious university	
Transdisciplinary development	
Scholarships aboard	
Projects	

The main external factor they perceived as influential for reaching professional competence are the opportunities. The most frequent opportunities considered to have a positive impact on reaching professional competence are voluntariate, pedagogical staff and good university program. The most frequent threats considered to have a negative impact on reaching professional competence are time management, lack of jobs, competition and entourage.

The prospective teachers perceived their strong points in professional competence mainly as personality traits and their weaknesses the lack of professional knowledge and practical experience.

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