Student Teachers' Perception of Teaching Competences' Development through Teaching Practice

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Abstract: Through teaching practice the student teacher should acquire several competences to be an effective and self-confident teacher. During teaching practice students should develop competences such as didactic competences, communication skills, leadership qualities. The aim of present study was to research student teachers' perception of teaching competences' development through teaching practice. The mentor role and duration of teaching training from students teacher view were also examined. The study was carried out by surveying 87 students from the 1st to the 4th grade. The sample consisted of student teachers without practical teaching experience (1st and 2nd grade) and student teachers with practical teaching experience (3th and 4th grade). The results revealed that the student teachers, who experienced practical teaching, on average evaluated their competence for different fields higher than students without teaching experience and that they more agreed that practical teaching training is more important for competence development, than theory. All student teacher also agreed that the practical teaching training is positively related of professional self-confidence. The results also revealed that student teachers want more practical teaching hours and that the student teachers with more practical teaching experience emphasised the role of the mentor more in terms of the qualitative analysis of their work than the student teacher without teaching experience.

Keywords: higher education, competences, home economics, practical teaching, student teachers.

Introduction

In recent years, in the field of teacher education, several studies have been made on global trends. One of them is a shift to a more practical-based approach (Moon, 2007). The fact is that student teachers also need, in addition to academic skills, practical knowledge on how to implement theoretical knowledge in practice. J. Loughran(2006) states that this can effectively be obtained only in a specific environment. F.A. Korthagen and J.P. Kessels (1999) noted that it is necessary to take into account the individual's perception of learning and teaching. They also believe that teaching is a complex process in which the teacher needs concrete and quick answers and that reflection on teachers owns work allows them to better understand their students' goals and needs.

Through teaching practice student teachers should achieved several with syllabus prescribed competences. The result of B. Malm (2009) research of teacher educators' opinions on competences that they considered to be essential to develop student teachers during their teacher education showed that for teacher educators it was very important to develop student teacher teaching skills, communication skills, leadership qualities and cognitive capacities, but interestingly competence: developing children's "self-confidence and personality" and so called "didactic competence" were not considered as being so important. M. Juriševič (Juriševič, Stopar, 2007) and colleagues stated that the competence model of education includes the following five fields of competencies that individuals can develop only in an authentic environment: didactic - methodical field, communications, the scope of creating a professional self-image, the scope of student self-regulation and educational management, core area of expertise.

Teaching practice on the subject Didactics of Home Economics in Slovenia occurred in the third year (two-week duration) and fourth year (two-week duration). Before the two-week teaching practice the student teacher must lead one teaching hour in the presence of a university teacher. Through the teaching practice, student teachers should develop several curriculum prescribed competences related to:

- professional knowledge (knowledge/ understanding of developmental differences and the needs of individuals).
- professional skills (practical work linked to teaching the lessons, management in specific

learning situations, the ability to critically evaluate and assess one's own work; the ability to form proposals for improving work, the value of continuous personal and professional development).

A.J. Hobson (2002, 5) research showed that "*student teachers consider mentoring to be a, if not the, key aspect of school-based initial teacher training"*. How effective the student teacher education will be depends, among others, on mentors. D.K. Cohen and H.C. Hill (2001) stated that teacher educating programs must provide meaningful context, structure of teacher's candidates learning experience and fully prepared mentors. The mentor can have several rules; the mentor can be source of information adviser and supporter (Hawkey, 1998).

This study aims to examine the student teachers' opinions on teaching competences development through teaching practice. The research questions were as follows:

- How practical teaching experience impacts the student teachers' perception of their professional competence.
- How student teachers evaluated the number of hours devoted to practical teaching.
- What student teachers expect from practical teaching training.

M**ethodology**

The research was conducted among 87 Home economics students from the 1st to the 4th grade. The student teachers were surveyed at the end of the winter courses; after the third and fourth grade students pass the obligatory teaching experience in the presence of a university teacher. The sample thus consisted of student teachers with practical teaching experience (TSPP) and student teachers without practical teaching experience (TSVP). The questionnaire contained questions related to (1) teacher students' opinion on the degree of competence achievement which can be obtained during teaching practice, (2) students' view of the impact of practical teaching experience to their self-confidence. Their attitudes were measured using a 7 point Lycart's scale, where 1- means strongly disagree and 7-strongly agree. The data was statistically processed with the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The frequency counts were run on all items. The dipper analyses involved a t-test where the significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used.

Results and discussion

Table 1 describes the socio-demographic characteristics of the students in the sample. The majority of the surveyed students were female; on average, 22.7 years old.

Table 2

The socio-demographic characteristics of the students

Variable	f	%
Gender		
Male	3	3.4
Female	84	96.6
Grade		
First grade	25	28.7
Second grade	22	25.3
Third grade	20	23.0
Fourth grade	19	21.8
Average age	21.7 years	

The results (Table 2) revealed that the student teachers who experienced practical teaching (STPP) on average evaluated their competence for different fields higher than students without teaching experience (STVP). The statistical significant differences were also found. The student teachers with practical teaching experience statistically significantly agreed more that they had mastered the subject of some modules ($t=-3.043$, $p=0.003$). They also statistically significantly agreed more that they possessed the ability of interpretation and evaluation of the information and facts ($t= -2.687$, $p=0.009$).

Table 2

The student teachers' view on the degree of achieving the teaching competences

Competence	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Knowing and understanding the developmental characteristics of the pupils.	1	47	4.89	1.047	-.019	0.985
	2	39	4.90	0.788		
Mastering subject (facts, terms…).	1	47	4.43	1.211	-3.043	**0.003**
	2	39	5.15	0.961		
	1	39	4.85	1.113		
Ability for the interpretation and evaluation of the information and facts.	2	47	4.98	0.967	-2.687	**0.009**
	1	39	5.51	0.854		
Development of science thinking.	2	47	5.17	1.129	-1.816	0.073
	1	39	5.56	0.821		
Knowing, understanding and the ability to correctly use the terms.	2	47	5.02	1.053	-1.656	0.101
	1	39	5.38	0.963		
Flexible use of knowledge in practice.	2	47	4.79	1.250	-3.059	**0.003**
	1	39	5.56	1.071		
	2	39	5.69	0.950		
Ability to organize, lead the practical work, assessing working dangers and working in accordance with the regulations.	1	47	4.98	1.422	-2.863	**0.005**
	2	39	5.69	0.863		
Mastering the teaching skills related to the explanation of the subject contents.	1	47	4.64	1.258	-5.097	**0.000**
	2	39	5.79	0.833		
Mastering the methodical-didactical aspect of teaching.	1	47	4.89	1.088	-3.631	**0.000**
	2	39	5.62	0.747		
Mastering communication skills.	1	47	5.32	1.181	-1.863	0.066
	2	39	5.72	0.793		

1- students teachers without practical teaching experience
2- students with practical teaching experience

The student teacher with practical teaching experience also statistically significant agreed more that they possessed the competence of the flexible use of knowledge in the teaching practice (t=-3.059, p= 0.003), that they master the teaching skills related to the subject content explanation (t=-5.097, p=0.000) and that they master the methodical-didactical aspect of teaching (t= -3.631, p=. 0.000). They also statistically significantly evaluate their competences higher for leading the practical hours, like handicraft, cooking…(t=-2.863, p=0.005) than student teachers without practical teaching experience.

The Home Economics subject consists of four modules (economics, textiles, food and nutrition and the living environment). For the student teacher in the general perception of knowledge competencies it is very important how the student teacher perceives their knowledge of single modules. The results showed that students with practical teaching experience statistically significantly agree more that they mastered the subject of textiles, food and nutrition and the living environment better than students without teaching experience. Also they evaluated their knowledge from the economics module higher, but the difference was not statistically significant. The results showed that student teachers of higher grades (3^{rd} and 4^{th} grade) evaluated their knowledge higher than students from the 1^{st} and 2^{nd} grades (Table 3). The students also evaluated their knowledge the highest on food and nutrition topics. The results that food and nutrition topics were evaluated the highest were expected. In the study programme students listened to only one obligatory course from Economics and Textile while they could listen to several subjects on food and nutrition. So the result that students from higher grades (students with practical teaching experience) evaluated their knowledge higher for the content of the individual modules can also be connected with practical teaching experience where the student teacher

must think how to explain some subjects. But for the final conclusion the dipper research should be done.

Table 3

The student teachers' opinion on mastering the subject of single modules

How well did you master the following areas?	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Economics topics	1	47	3.55	.829	-.725	0.471
	2	39	3.67	.621		
Textile topics	1	47	3.51	.930	-2.330	**0.022**
	2	39	3.90	.598		
Living environment	1	47	3.70	.832	-2.591	**0.011**
	2	39	4.10	.598		
Food and nutrition topics	1	47	3.96	.721	-2.561	**0.012**
	2	39	4.33	.621		

1- students teachers without practical teaching experience
2- students with practical teaching experience

Students were also asked to answer how many teaching hours they thought they must lead independently through the study time to achieve the stated competences. The answers showed that the students wished they had a lot more teaching hours than prescribed at this moment. The students estimate (on average) that they must have 116.71 teaching hours; now for practical teaching there is intended 30 hours per year (including the teaching hours of the student teachers, hospitation, observation of the school's organization, and the school kitchen…).

In question: "*What are your expectations regarding the practical teaching training?"* some interesting answers were given". The most important for them was that through practical teaching training they gain:

- teaching experience (23.7%),
- professional self-esteem (18.4%),
- professional competence (3.9%),
- get a good preparation for a future occupation (7.9%).

Furthermore, students also stated that they expected the possibility to use their theoretical knowledge in practical situations; learning how to react in different teaching situations, conflict resolution, principles of good communication, and how to solve some mistakes. They also want more teaching practice. One student teacher said directly what several said not so explicitly:

"*I wish we had more practical teaching training; now there are not enough practical teaching hours. Practical teaching training should start in the 1st grade, because some people take until the 3rd grade to realize that they are not born to be a teacher."*

Another student added*: "I wish we had more practical teaching training; now there are not enough practical teaching hours. Some subjects are not so important and could be deleted and replaced with more hours of practical teaching training."*

Some student teachers (students without teaching experience) also expect that for the first teaching hours they can teach in a quiet class. The answers between the students with teaching experience and others was very similar, but students with practical teaching experience more often stated that they wished for more hours of teaching practice and they also mentioned that they wished for a good cooperation with their mentor and the mentor's feedback on their realization of the teaching hours.

The role of mentor in the teaching process was examined with the question: "*What do you expect from your mentor?"* The results showed (Table 4) that students without teaching experience expected help with ideas on how to prepare the teaching hours but students who had practical teaching experience

statistically significantly expected more (X^2=4.455, df=1, p=0.018) that their teacher would accompany them and give them feedback – an analysis of the student's teaching hours.

Table 4

Student teachers' expectation regarding their practical teaching experience

What do you expect from your mentor?	Group	N	f	%
Conceptual assistance in the preparation of learning units.	1	47	16	34
	2	39	11	28
Providing adequate material working conditions.	1	47	5	10.6
	2	39	3	7.7
Correcting errors.	1	47	11	23.4
	2	39	6	5.4
Monitoring and an analysis of the students' teaching hours.	1	47	17	36.2
	2	39	23	59
1- students teachers without practical teaching experience 2- students with practical teaching experience				

The student teacher was also asked, what they thought is more important for professional competence development – practical teaching training or theoretical knowledge. The results revealed that students with practical teaching experience and student teachers without practical teaching experience agreed that practical teaching training was more important for competence development, than theory (Table 5).

Table 5

The student teachers' opinion on the importance of practical teaching training for professional competence development

Group	The practical teaching training is more important for professional competence development than theory.					
	Yes		No		I don't know	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	42	89.4	0	0	5	10.6
2	36	92.3	2	5.1	1	3.6
1- students teachers without practical teaching experience 2- students with practical teaching experience						

All the surveyed student teachers also agreed that the practical teaching training positively impacted the development of professional self-confidence.

Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to get student teachers' opinions on teaching competences' development through teaching practice and also their perception on self-confidence development through teaching training. The results suggest that:

- Practical teaching experience impacts the student teachers' perception of their professional competence. Students with practical teaching experience perceived themselves more competent in the field of subject knowledge, perceived themselves more didactically competent (for teaching theory and also practical work - handicrafts...) than student teachers without practical teaching experience.
- The student teachers connect practical teaching experience positively with self-esteem.

- The student teachers with more practical teaching experience emphasised the role of the mentor in terms of the importance of feedback (qualitative analysis of their work), while the student teacher without teaching experience expected that the mentor would help more on ideas in planning and that they would provide material conditions of work.
- The student teacher expect from practical teaching training to get teaching experience professional self-esteem, professional competence, a good preparation for a future occupation, knowledge on conflict resolution, principles of good communication. The student teachers want also more practical teaching hours.

The results highlight the role of practical teaching experience for competence development and professional self-esteem.

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