Developing Teacher Competences in a Student Teacher Population

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Slovak education is currently undergoing a reform process aimed at achieving better quality in the education and learning outcomes of students. A decrease in the number of teachers, and applicants for teacher training programmes, as well as the drop in interest of the graduates to work at schools has been observed for some time. Regarding the recruitment of students for the teaching profession, recent years have been marked by a lower quality of applicants for teacher training programmes, a reduction in the number of applicants, and also by an incapacity to select from a pool of prospective students. This paper presents a system of professional teacher training designed to align the content and practical pedagogical components, which are based on a complex matrix of teacher competences. The teacher's competence profile is based on the pupil's competency profile and it focuses on three core competence groupings: the professional development of the teacher, the development of the pupil's personality, and the educational process. The competences are currently the subject of the APVV-14-0446 project Assessment of Teacher Competences, which examines the possibilities of creating a system of assessment criteria for teachers' performance and its application.

Introduction

In the current period, we are experiencing a significant reform in the content and organisation of education, as well as change in the social status of the teacher, as result of the implementation of reform within the Slovak education system. One of the reasons for these reforms is the decline of interest by secondary school graduates in

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teacher training programs at faculties of education in comparison with the recent past. The quality of education at primary and secondary school level is related to the quality of teacher training, which naturally depends on the quality of candidates for teacher education programmes. It should be noted that the decrease in the quality of student teacher candidates is also due to the absence of selection measures, e.g. entrance examinations for candidates to enter these programmes.

A professional national discussion is currently taking place in the country which is focused on improving the quality of the teacher's professional performance through improved undergraduate training expressed in the form of the teacher's professional competency requirements. Experts from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra are researching and creating a comprehensive model and tools for assessing different teaching competences in school practice. At the same time, there are also attempts to create ever more adequate conditions for continuous teacher education in the form of career growth and the realisation of the idea of lifelong learning.

**Education of Student Teachers in the Slovak Republic**

Undergraduate (Bachelor's level) and postgraduate (Master's level) teacher training in the Slovak Republic is provided at universities and these programmes are referred to as Teaching Academic Subjects (hereinafter TAS).

The field of TAS has been traditionally been linked to the social need for training teachers of general education subjects at the level of lower and upper secondary education. Different study programmes in the stated field of study are usually undertaken as a combination of two academic subjects; their names are usually derived from the names of the relevant subject fields. The content of education in the different TAS study programmes is related to the definition of a graduate's professional profile, which consists of a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The professional profile of the graduate is defined by the Accreditation
Commission, an advisory body of the Government of the Slovak Republic, which also assesses and evaluates the quality of the educational, research, development, artistic and other creative activities of universities in the Slovak Republic. The Accreditation Commission is a working group of experts in the field of pedagogical science and research, which defines and monitors the professional profile of a graduate at the Bachelor's and Master's levels of studies.

At the level of Bachelor’s study, graduates are expected to acquire the following theoretical knowledge: they are aware of and understand the concept of the institutional socialisation process in broader socio-scientific contexts; are aware of the psychological interpretation of human development, upbringing and education; are knowledgeable about the principles of creating and designing educational and didactic environments in secondary education; are well aware of the organisational characteristics of the school system as well as the institutional principles and rules of the school; know the basic structure and content of the two subject specialisation they teach; are ready to apply for the full teaching qualification and complete the 2nd (Master’s) level of university studies.

A core part of the studies and formation of the competences of student teachers are the practical capacities they also develop: graduates should be able to analyse and reflect on the general educational and didactic characteristics of teaching in the classroom; to understand and utilise school legislation, school regulations and documents; plan and organise the class activities for pupils of the respective age group (11-18-year students); assist in solving professional tasks in subjects of their subject specialisation; can use information and communication technologies for personal and professional needs as well as for educational purposes.

Additional skills and abilities of the 1st (Bachelor's) level graduate include: the habit of continuous education, the ability to use scientific texts from the field of pedagogy, as well as from the relevant subjects of their specialisation; effective communication with colleagues, and the capacity to work as part of a team with staff
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and students; awareness of the possibilities and concrete ways of using modern educational technology.

For a Master's level graduate in TAS the mastery of the following theoretical knowledge is required: graduates are aware of the current theoretical models of cognitive socialisation and education; they have acquired the basic content, methodology and epistemology of the subjects of their specialisation; they are knowledgeable about the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject didactics of their specialisation, especially with regard to planning and designing teaching in the school classroom; are aware of the ways in which information and communication technologies are used in education.

Practical skills of the Master's level graduate include an ability to: design and implement teaching of the relevant subjects at the level of lower and upper secondary education; adapt educational programmes in the subjects taught to the specific conditions of pupils, school classes and type of school; purposefully promote the development of pupils' information literacy; analyse and evaluate alternative programs for secondary education; know how to effectively discuss pedagogical and subject knowledge with the wider professional and general community.

The complementary knowledge and abilities of the Master's level graduate are: ability to design and develop methodology texts with wider applicability, e-learning, knowledge of legal, economic and ethical aspects of work in their field (quoted from the Accreditation Committee document describing Study field 1.1.1 Teaching Academic Subjects - Študijný odbor).

The employment of TAS graduates in the labour market is differentiated according to the achieved level of education - 1st (Bachelor's) level graduate and 2nd (Master's) level graduate of university studies. In the description of the Study field 1.1.1 Teaching of Academic Subjects, it is stated:

The 1st (Bachelor's) level graduate can work as:
- assistant teacher, or teacher's assistant, educator responsible for extra-curricular activities for children,
- state administration employee responsible for the area concerned,
- school administrative or methodological worker (according to subject specialisation, e.g. manager of school libraries, computer networks, school technology and laboratory funds, and others).

The 2nd (Master's) level graduate can work as:
- the teacher of the relevant subjects at lower and upper secondary education;
- expert in methodologies for teaching specific subjects and subject groups;
- specialised staff of the state administration for education and training at lower and upper secondary schools.

**Professional Competences of Teachers**

*Understanding the competences of a teacher*

A prerequisite of good work in the field of education is a set of specific competences that a student acquires at the time of their undergraduate training, which reflects the professional reality of teaching. The current concept of understanding a teacher as a professional is based on the integration of pedagogy with psychology in didactics, psycho-didactics and pedagogy with each subject content taught in close alignment with subject didactics. In undergraduate TAS studies, the integration of theory and practice, interaction between objective and subjective knowledge, and explicit and implicit knowledge is required as this is reflected in the complex web of knowledge, experiences, abilities, but also in attitudes and values required of teachers. Slovak theoreticians, experts in pedagogical science, focus their attention on the area of teacher competences, on defining teacher competency profile (Kosová - Kasáčová, 2006). Teacher competences can be defined
as a set of dispositions and skills, consisting of specific requirements: subject specific, psychological-didactic, communicative, organisational, managerial, counselling, consulting, and reflection. Competences are a prerequisite for entering the teaching profession; their form is reflected in teaching practice, where competence is evident in a real, demonstrable and observable form (Lomnický - Predanoczyová, 2014).

The starting point for fulfilling the requirements of professionalisation of the teaching profession is a systematic approach based on the teacher's competency profile. The teacher's competency profile consists of key and specific competences, which are elaborated in the professional standards for different career levels of teaching staff in the form of indicators, i.e. provable knowledge, skills and attitudes. The creation of the competency profile of a Slovak teacher respects: the priority of teacher personal development oriented at learner development, European trends and documents focusing on the key competences of the 21st century learner, and the recognition of three dimensions of teacher professionalism (professional, ethical and personal).

The current teacher profile (Kasáčová, 2006) has its own internal structure which respects the interactive model of education and consists of three dimensions. Each dimension represents a set of competences that are based on specific capabilities (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). The first dimension is associated with the learner (identifying learner's developmental and individual characteristics, identifying psychological and social factors of their learning, identifying socio-cultural context of learner development); the second one relates to the management of the educational process, creating the conditions for education and influencing personality development of learners (to master the content of the subjects to be taught, the ability to plan and design education, the ability to set learner-oriented educational goals, the ability of psycho-didactic analysis of the subject matter, the ability to select and implement a variety of teaching forms and methods, the ability to evaluate the course and achievements of the learner's education, the ability to create a positive classroom climate, and use
the material and technological facilities in the educational process, the ability to influence the learner's personal development, the ability to develop social skills and attitudes of the learner). The last dimension is associated with the individual teacher (to plan and develop their own professional skills and self-development, the ability to identify with their professional role and school) (Lukáčová, Hašková, 2017).

The integration model of education, which forms the teacher's competency framework, has several advantages: simplicity and clarity, uniqueness of naming, inclusion of all professional activities and competences into a wider context of competences, the possibility of developing them into provable indicators and the suitability of the competency model for the development of teacher training programmes.

**Learner competence profile**

The development of learner personality is an essential goal of education and training in the school environment. In current Slovak educational research, the problem of learner competency is a topical issue and characteristics of a pupil's competences are described as a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, ways of behavior, capacity to manage personal life, social life and work responsibilities (Turek, 2010, 2014; Blaško, 2016; Petlák, 2006). The competency profile of the Slovak pupil, i.e. the sum of their required key competences, is currently defined by Act N° 245/2008 (the Act on Education and Training). The system of competences consists of: civic competences, communication and socio-interaction competences, intrapersonal and interpersonal competences, competences of creative problem solving, cultural competences, competences related to education as lifelong need, competences related to the use of information and communication technologies, competences in the field mathematical and scientific phenomena (Predanocyová, 2017).

The complex web of pupils' key competences is the starting point for setting teaching and learning requirements, i.e. the objectives of
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education and training and their translation into different subjects. The capacity to design and implement programmes to promote these competences assumes that teachers are well prepared, and well educated for their role.

**Competences of Student Teachers and Their Development**

In the context of the *Evaluation of Teacher Competences* project, a team of Slovak experts from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra (Slovakia) is working on the improvement of the existing teacher's competency profile, accepting its basic structure and functionality. With regard to the issue of assessing the quality of professional requirements for teachers, there is a need to prioritise within teacher training the competences that will be indispensable for their future teaching and educational work in schools. In the text which follows we outline the most important and prioritised requirements.

**Teacher competences focused on the pupil**

Developing a pupil's personality is an essential phenomenon, influencing the goals, character, content and organisation of education and training. Considering theoretical works of experts, in Slovakia the pupil-centered teacher competences are characterised by the following requirements:

- didactic and psychological: the teacher is able to adapt to pupils’ individual needs;
- pedagogical: the teacher is aware of and can orientate teaching methods to develop individual pupils, irrespective of their differences;
- diagnostic and intervention: the teacher can use diagnostic instruments in the area of individual assessment of pupils, their developmental stages, and social relations in the classroom (Vašutová, 2007).
To identify pupils’ developmental and individual characteristics. This competence focuses on the student teacher’s capacity to identify and recognise pupils’ developmental and individual characteristics. Teacher education programmes focus on two developmental stages: the period of late childhood and the period of adolescence. In the period of the late childhood a pupil acquires the skills of reading, writing, and counting; basic concepts and notions are being developed; social roles and moral standards are set and acquired; pupils form their attitudes towards themselves and others; gradually they become aware of their personal autonomy. During the period of adolescence, the school helps the pupil to adopt their own identity; acquire new dimensions of interactions with peers; emotional independence from parents and other adults; the pupil chooses a profession and prepares for the job; prepares for engaging in responsible social behavior; develops intellectual abilities and value attitudes (Havighurst, in: Kuric, 1997).

The training of student teachers in the context of this competence is realised mainly on a theoretical level, because teaching practice provides only limited possibilities for trainees to develop and form the competence at the level of its practical implementation. The graduate of a teacher training programme should have adequate knowledge of biological, psychological and sociological aspects of children and youth development. They should be able to creatively and effectively use their knowledge to identify pupils’ individual characteristics, have a basic experience with them, and at the same time be prepared to accept the individuality of each child.

Psychological and social aspects of pupils’ learning. Another competence relates to the capacity of the student teacher to identify psychological and social factors of pupils’ learning (being aware of learning theories, diagnostics, and the use of different learning styles). This competence includes fundamental pedagogical rules of learning, including: motivation, feedback, transfer, and revision.

Slovak theoreticians (Sokolová et al., 2014), based on research into the relationship between pupils’ personality and their attainment,
have confirmed that pupils’ success is determined by the style of teaching and the pupils’ learning style. Knowing the individual differences, personality types, and styles of learning is a prerequisite for successful communication by the teacher with their pupils, creating a working environment in the class which has an overall positive impact on the educational process. Student teachers should have sufficient knowledge about individual differences to enable them to develop appropriate lessons for their pupils. These individual differences may be related to their concentration span, their capacity to abstract or generalise, their dependence on concrete materials; and the orientation of the pupil between impulsivity and reflexivity (an impulsive individual is fast, but often inaccurate, and a reflexive one solves tasks exactly, but needs an extended period).

**Developing a pupil's personality.** Personality development of a pupil is the primary goal of education in each school system. In the context of forming and shaping the competences of student teachers, these are directly linked to the system of knowledge from the fields of developmental psychology and individual characteristics of the pupil. The development of a pupil's personality presupposes that the teacher trainees are able to master a huge theoretical knowledge pertinent to the issue of personality. We understand the learner personality as a system of biological, social, environmental and psychic components that mutually interweave, influence and create a framework of specific characteristics, abilities, experiences, and thought processes for each individual.

Considering the mission of a school, to train and educate learners, and effectively influence the potential of developing each pupil's personality, we emphasise three levels of interconnected influence: cognitive (abilities, dispositions, knowledge, intelligence), affective (emotions, feelings, experiences, motivation, social relations, and self-regulation) and psychomotor (movement, sensory perception, skills, habits, manners). In addition, it is necessary to take into account internal and external factors involved in the development of pupils during their school attendance. Inner
factors include psychological and physical well-being, temperament, structure and level of their intelligence, their activity, learning style of a pupil, level of their education. The pupil’s home context, the school educational environment, and the influence of peers or interest groups represent a further set of external factors. In establishing this area of competence, we prioritise two aspects: awareness of the methods for assessing pupils' individual characteristics with regard to the socio-cultural environment, and the capacity to accept and include pupils' differences without prejudice and stereotyping.

Student teachers’ competence is informed by knowledge of the field of socio-cultural background in Slovakia, and the specific knowledge of multiculturalism (Jakubovská - Predanocová, 2011). In order to develop and promote inclusion (Predanocová, 2017) and possible changes in attitudes of learners, we acknowledge three personality components: cognitive, affective and behavioural. The components are formed by the student teacher through their academic studies, but also through immediate and mediated individual and collective experiences.

The second part of the competence matrix focuses on the abilities required to identify the specific educational needs of pupils in a socio-cultural context. Among them we include knowledge of methods for determining the pupils’ individual characteristics with regard to their socio-cultural background, tools for judging the influence of the socio-cultural background on pupils' academic attainment, and the ability to draw conclusions in order to optimise teaching strategies.

**Teacher competences focused on the teaching process**

In training teachers to become competent we take into account the complexity of abilities required in a classroom situation: perception and evaluation of critical incidences, selection and application of appropriate methods based on analytical-critical and creative thinking, constructiveness and cooperative approach to problem solving in the classroom. We evaluate the extent to which the
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student teacher has the expertise and ability to create a positive classroom climate, to master the content and didactics of the subject taught, to assess learners, and to use appropriate methods and didactic instruments and teaching aids.

Creating school and class climate. The efficiency of the educational process is, among others, ensured by the teacher through the creation of a suitable school and class climate. Part of the teacher training programme is to make student teachers aware of the environment they create from both theoretical and practical aspects. The climate in the educational environment significantly determines the performance of learners, but its creation is to a great extent dependent on teachers’ competence.

Creating the school climate is a long-term process; it is a set of psycho-social relationships among all teachers, which are reflected in the behavior and communication of pupils and their teachers at school (Průcha - Veteška, 2012). Gerčmanová, Holoušová and Urbanovská (1998) and Petláč (2006) point to the fact that school climate represents the overall quality of the school environment that affects its cultural and social dimension, its value system, level of cooperation and communication, behaviour, and range of activities. The school climate issues have been examined by a number of researchers; their approaches vary slightly and are influenced by numerous factors: school objectives, school work tasks, school education focus, conflict resolution approaches, school leadership, and contacts with the wider community (Petláč, 2006; Janík - Švec, 2009).

Creating the class climate is a relatively short-term process which may change during the day, is specific to each class, and is determined by psycho-social relationships among different pupils, and the relationship between each teacher and his/her cohort of pupils. The class climate has a major impact on the overall behaviour and engagement of pupils in the educational process, the attainment of the class, their learning processes and outcomes, but also the wellbeing of the teacher (Kalhoust - Obst, 2002). The class climate is created by the involvement of the whole community of
pupils, groups of pupils, individual pupils and teachers who teach in the class.

Creating a favorable climate in the school can have a major impact on pupils' work and their attitude towards learning, so teacher competences and abilities in this area are very important. While developing this competence with student teachers we emphasise subject and didactic professionalism, personality qualities, ability to manage class work, openness, flexibility, and the implementation of methods that promote creativity and student autonomy. Core to achieving this competence is the demonstration of a positive attitude towards pupils, an ability and willingness of teachers to cooperate with parents, empathy, and positive communication skills.

Mastering the content and didactics of the subjects taught. It is vital that student teachers develop an in-depth and systemic knowledge of their field of study as well as an ability to translate this knowledge into appropriate content lessons for their classes, integrate this content with other curricular areas, and use imaginative information technologies to communicate this knowledge. The second component is the psycho-didactic ability, in which the teacher is aware of teaching strategies, correctly uses didactic tools and aids, and methods of pedagogical diagnostics (Švec, 2005).

Student teachers who have acquired this professional competence are capable of formulating appropriate teaching goals and objectives, organising the work in the lesson, communicating the subject matter in an accessible manner, using the knowledge in practice, bringing recent research into the classroom, as well as connecting new knowledge with pupils’ prior knowledge. They learn to use multiple approaches to promote pupils’ creativity and autonomy, to provide feedback, and are well-versed in the use of a range of diagnostic tools. Student teachers are also required to demonstrate their capacity in the use of digital technologies (Hašková, 2018; Lomnický - Jonášková - Predanocyová, 2018).
Designing and planning education. This competence is necessary for the effective and successful management of teaching. The starting point for designing and planning a lesson is the capacity to set learning and teaching objectives. The definition of objectives is primarily related to the requirements outlined in Act No. 245/2008 (the School Act), which focuses on the selection and formatting of general goals for education based on the pupil's requirements (pupil's key competences). The specific objectives derive from the goals for education and are directly related to the organisation of the learning process (Gadušová et al., 2017). Good teachers are capable of designing lessons that include pupils of all capacities.

Long-term planning is reflected in the capacity to utilise the national educational programme and curriculum framework, to create a long-term scheme of work which can be delivered in our school system. This activity requires each teacher to develop school educational programmes, curricula and syllabi. Medium-term planning is the creation of thematic education and training plans and is central to individual planning activities. Short-term planning is core to the everyday professional work of the teacher and includes the complicated thinking process that results in a teacher's choice of the subject matter, pupils’ learning activities, and the teacher's teaching activities (Predanocová, 2015).

Selection and implementation of teaching methods and pupil activities. The correct selection and application of teaching methods and pupil activities has a significant impact on the quality and efficiency of the educational work of the teacher. Appropriately chosen methods lead to the fulfillment of a set of pupil competences, and contribute to the creation of the atmosphere and the overall class climate.

In developing the required professional competence, a student teacher needs to understand the theoretical basis underpinning approaches, but also needs exposure to a variety of methods which later enable her/him to be creative in their teaching (Kalhous-Obst, 2002; Turek, 2010), Kotrba-Lacina, 2007). It is important that student teachers understand the rationale for choosing the
objectives of their classes, the content of the subject curriculum, methods of instruction, the material and technical equipment and facilities they will require, and the intellectual and personal predispositions of the learners. The teaching process requires teachers to adapt their work in response to the pupils' work; it is important that student teachers are also aware of the need to vary the different forms of teaching organisation to promote pupils’ learning and that teaching approaches/methods are an important tool in managing and directing education.

The use of resources. It is important for student teachers to understand the benefits and characteristics of various resources. The utilisation of concrete objects, visual aids and interactive materials can serve to explicate difficult concepts, enable more advanced, faster and more complex learning, motivate pupils, and assist them in acquiring knowledge and skills more efficiently. These teaching resources fulfill a multiplicity of functions within a lesson: motivational, feedback, information, enhance concentration, and encourage student application while keeping pupils on task (Záhorec, Hašková, Munk, 2018; Turek, 2014).

Assessment. In-class assessment is determined by the context of the teaching, and the goals and objectives of the lesson (Kolář - Šikulová, 2009). During the undergraduate training, students are acquainted with assessment processes and are guided by their university lecturers not only in how to cope "technically" with the assessment, but they are introduced to the rationale for assessment, the variety of assessment tools available and are guided in the interpretation of results based on pupil scores. In Slovakia, we consider it important for the student to acquire an awareness and understanding of the skills associated with assessment such as: validity (suitability of the assessment tool with respect to checking the knowledge), reliability (indicator of reliability and precision), sensitivity (the indicator distinguishing pupils’ capacity/competence), objectivity (formal objectivity is oriented at assessing the conditions of the learning process, content objectivity is focused on the clarity of the tasks we use in the process of evaluation and assessment).
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Current Requirements on Education and Work of Teachers in Slovakia

The Slovak Republic has brought in new and necessary reforms in the field of education and training, in order to bring Slovak education in line with the education experienced by European Union citizens and also to prioritise education as an essential means of ensuring the state’s sustainable development. These goals and requirements have been translated into regulations that are applied to the Slovak school system.

The document *Europe 2020 Strategy for Education* was adopted by the European Commission in Brussels in 2010 and outlines indicators against which the education systems of the various member states can be evaluated. These indicators are as follows:

1. rates of early leavers (young people who leave education and training before the end of compulsory education);
2. rates of those aged 30–34 who have completed higher education;
3. rates of 15-year-old pupils with low skills;
4. employment rate of fresh graduates;
5. number of children in pre-primary education;
6. participation of adult population in lifelong learning (*Europe 2020 Strategy*).

Currently, the level of achievement of these targets in Slovakia varies from one indicator to another one (e.g. currently Slovakia does not satisfy the minimum requirements of the *Europe 2020 Strategy* for indicators 4, 5, 6).

The *National Programme for Development of Education and Training* (hereinafter NPRVV) is therefore aimed at enhancing Slovakia’s capacity to meet all six objectives outlined in the *Europe 2020 Strategy* and to ensure that the existing education and training system in the Slovak Republic as a whole, from pre-primary
education to adult lifelong education, promotes inclusion and integration (NPRVV, 2018).

To date, the most comprehensive set of global priorities for sustainable development is Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (hereinafter Agenda 2030) of the United Nations. The United Nations adopted Agenda 2030 at the 70th General Assembly on September 25, 2015. Its objectives and related sub-objectives came into force on January 1, 2016 and the decisions of all countries over the next fifteen years will be governed by them. The key principles of transformation, integration and universality have been selected by the UN to guide their member states to set their national policies, strategies and planning in a way that will lead towards sustainability and contribute to global goals.

In March 2016, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved the Basics of Implementing the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. It set out the key steps to implement 17 sustainable development goals and 169 related sub-objectives of the new universal Agenda 2030.

The objectives of the Agenda 2030 are as follows: end of poverty, end of hunger, health and quality of life, quality education, gender equality, drinking water and sewerage for all, affordable and clean energies, labour and economic growth, industry and innovation, less disparities, sustainable cities and municipalities, production and consumption, climate changes, life in water, land life, justice and institutions, partnerships to meet the goals.

In the context of the issues related to formation of the professional competences of student teachers, attention should be drawn to the aim directed at the quality of education, which is identified in the Agenda 2030 as one of the best and most efficient measures for achieving sustainable development. Part of the objective is ensuring inclusive, fair and quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. This document will be the instrument for assessing the state’s level of achievement against stated goals. The specific indicators are as follows:
the rate of early school leaving (% of population aged 18-24);
- the extent of completed tertiary education (% of population aged 30-34);
- the rate of adult participation in lifelong learning (% of population aged 25-64).

The capacity of Slovakia to meet the goal of quality education was described in 2016: *Slovakia belongs among the countries with a lower rate of early school leaving than the EU average is. Warning fact, however, is the recently increasing trend of this indicator. Despite the fact that the rate of completed tertiary education in Slovakia has been on the rise for a long time, the proportion of the population with university education is low compared to most of the EU member states. The low percentage of the Slovak population is also involved in lifelong learning, while the rate of their participation in it is constantly decreasing in recent years.*" (Slovak Republic and Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030, 2016, p. 31).

The *National Programme for the Development of Education and Training* is a reaction to the real quality of education in Slovakia and a response to the current educational requirements as outlined in the international documents, *Europe 2020 Strategy for Education and Agenda 2030.*

Currently, the situation in the Slovak system of education can be evaluated as a process of searching for systematic solutions in the transformation process, with the emphasis on the necessary improvement in the quality of education. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic prepared the document entitled *The National Programme for the Development of Education and Training*, which was adopted on 7 June, 2018. The subtitle of the document outlines the ambition of the state to achieve high quality and accessible education for Slovakia and includes perspectives for the development of education for the years 2018-2027.
NPRVV is a live document that will be revised, if necessary, in two-year cycles and in the long term it emphasises three requirements:

1. increasing the inclusivity of the school system,
2. transitioning to a one-structure model of education;
3. total system refinancing (NPRVV, 2018, p.5).

The document contains an analysis of the current state and characteristics of the education and training system; it outlines the basic principles and starting points, structure and intervention logic, and specifies the goals and priorities for the development of education. The implementation plan contains the criteria and reference frameworks, scenarios and assumptions that underpin the overall economic and political development of the state during the implementation process.

In the context of the education of student teachers in the Slovak Republic, three strategic objectives contained in the NPRVV document are relevant:

1. improving the quality of education and training;
2. increasing the availability of quality education and training;
3. modernising education and training (NPRVV, 2018, p. 33).

The strategic objectives have been transformed into 12 specific objectives (six for regional, primary and secondary education and six for higher education) and 106 measures that are developed in the Implementation Plan, consisting of five two-year sequential and interconnected action plans.

Regional education emphasises the need for quality education and training, change of teachers’ status and evaluation, accessibility of education for all levels and classes of society, the requirement to respond to the needs of individuals and society. The last goal included reference to the creation of such conditions for learners that they enjoy learning and they can live healthy lives.

The document states specific examples of activities by means of which strategic goals could be achieved:
### QUALITY

Converting quantity into quality

- Improve the quality of educational content.
- When admitting students to study TAS, apply minimum selection criteria.
- Increase the quality of science and research at universities.
- Improve the quality of the system through a new management, financing and evaluation system.

### ACCESSIBILITY

"The best school is the nearest school"

- Expand the accessibility of a quality education and training system for all by promoting integration and inclusion.
- Reduce segregation rates in regional education among schools within the level of education.
- Completely remove dual-mode operation in regional education.

### MODERNISATION

Achieving current international standards

- Upgrade educational content and align it with international standards (e.g. the European Qualifications Framework)
- Modernise testing and diagnostic methods.
- Link education to the needs of society and economic practice (labour market).
- Increase digital skills and competences of both pupils and teachers.

(Source: NPRVV, 2018)

An important part of the National Programme is *cross-sectorial priorities*. The importance of these measures is seen in the need to plan systemic links through which the education and training system will contribute to addressing complex social and economic
phenomena. The National Programme has identified three cross-sectorial priorities:

1. integration and inclusion of marginalised Roma communities and learners from a socially disadvantaged environment;
2. linking the education and training system to the needs of the economy and labour market, and

Considering the binding nature of the National Programme for the future development of the Slovak system of education, the quality of teacher training and their professional activities, it is necessary for schools and teaching staff to gradually implement the strategic goals and sub-objectives into their pedagogical activities. The source tool, which orientates teachers in concrete steps is the Implementation Plan NPRVV, which contains different fields, thematic areas, test measures and ways of its implementation, timing and financial layout (NPRVV, 2018).

**Conclusion**

A core part of teachers’ competency profile is their professional preparation and development, which is linked to the performance of the profession in schools. The forming and shaping of student teachers’ competences, as outlined in this paper, forms the basis, the springboard for their educational work in schools. However, from the point of view of teaching theory and practice, personal, professional and career development is necessary throughout the lifetime of the teacher, which requires a commitment to lifelong learning. This helps to develop and update the complex web of professional competences after graduation and contributes to the growth of the teacher's personality, improves and enhances their effectiveness in relation to their professional activities, in the form of teaching and planning.

The need to constantly increase the efficiency and quality of education and training of future generations in Slovakia is the topic
of much debate, but also the focus of intensive research. The *Evaluation of Teacher Competences* project (APVV-14-0446), in which the team from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra is investigating the tools and instruments for evaluating the quality of teachers' work and interrogating the results of their educational and training activities, is one such research project. This issue has not been systematically studied in Slovakia before and appears to be one of the serious problems of the current situation in education (Boboňová et al., 2017; Magová et al, 2016; Lomnický et al., 2017; Stranovská, et al., 2018). The project seeks to put into practice a comprehensive set of evaluation tools that would simultaneously document the complex range of competences to be addressed in the university training of student teachers, while at the same time articulating the requirements for improving the professional work of the teacher and their continued professional development.

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