



## Developing Teacher Competences in Student Teacher Populations

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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 programs, 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 teaching profession, recent years have been marked by a lower quality of applicants for teacher training programs and, in relation to lower number of applicants, also by the lack of adequate choice of prospective students. The paper presents a system of professional teacher training designed to align the content and practical pedagogical components, which are based on a complex of teacher competences. The teacher's competence profile is based on the pupil's competency profile and it focuses on three core competence groupings, related to the professional development of the teacher, the development of the pupil's personality and the educational process. The competences are currently 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 effort in qualitative change in the content and organization of education, as well as change in the social status of the teacher in connection with the implementation of the reform process of the Slovak education system. One of the reasons for these efforts is the decline of the

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interest of secondary school graduates in 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 preparation of teacher trainees. It should be noted that the decrease in the quality of preparation of will-be-teachers is also due to the absence of selection (entrance examinations) of candidates for this study, where it would be possible to do selection of the applicants based not only their potential to master the theory in the field but also their practical teaching predispositions.

A professional national discussion which is currently taking place in the country 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. The efforts of experts from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra are recently focused on researching and creating a comprehensive model and tools for assessing different teaching competences in school practice. At the same time, this results in the efforts to create ever more adequate conditions for continuous teacher education in the form of career growth and the realization of the idea of lifelong learning.

### **Education of Will-Be-Teachers in the Slovak Republic**

Undergraduate (Bachelor's level) and postgraduate (Master's level) teacher training in the Slovak Republic is realized at universities in teacher training study field Pre-school and Primary School Pedagogy and in the system of subjects within the study field Teaching Academic Subjects (hereinafter TAS).

The content of education in both study fields is closely 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 competence scope of the Accreditation Commission is governed by the Statute of the Accreditation Commission, which defines and regulates its activities; the Statute is approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic. One part of 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 the graduate at the Bachelor's and Master's levels of studies.

The study field Pre-School and Primary School Education emphasizes training teachers for pre-primary and primary education, for which theoretical and practical complexity of socializing and pedagogical processes is its specific feature; the study is realized at Bachelor's and the following it postgraduate - Master's, level.

The definition of the core knowledge at the first (Bachelor's) level of studies is as follows: the socio-scientific basis of the study field with the thematic orientation on the basic philosophical context of pedagogical thinking, the social and political context of education and training; pedagogical and psychological context of the study field: fundamentals of child development psychology and child biology, general theory of education and upbringing, theory of pre-school and out-of-school education, programs and general methodology of education and training of very young and young learners. Methodological context of the field comprises: methodology of educational and training activities in basic areas of education and training (language, mathematics and sciences, art, P.E.), educational project (semester assignment), final thesis (of methodology character) and state exam.

Graduate of the Master's level in the Pre-school and Primary School Education study field is aware of the social and scientific context of the field with thematic orientation at: cultural and socio-anthropological context of education, sociological interpretation of childhood, methodology of formation of social and scientific knowledge. Part of the study is the pedagogical and psychological context of the field, parts of which are the theories of cultural

literacy formation, models of cognitive development, models of personal and social development, the theory and practice of primary education, the theory of management of pre-school and out-of-school education. The didactic context of the field includes the didactics of basic areas of primary education (language, mathematics, initial science and social education, art and P.E.), the basics of research and project work in didactics, semester project (empirical research).

The target employment of the first level graduates in the study field Pre-primary and Primary School Education is the work of the teacher in the kindergarten, the educator in the institutions for very young and young learners (in particular in school clubs and leisure centers). Graduates of the Master's level of studies find their employment as teachers in primary schools, methodologists for pre-primary and primary education or as specialized state administration staff in the field of education and training of pre-school and primary school children (Study Field 1.01.05 Pre-primary and Primary School Education).

The study field TAS has 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 programs in the stated field of study are usually realized 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 programs is related to the definition of the graduate's professional profile, which consists of the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The graduate's professional profile on both levels of studies - Bachelor's and Master's, is defined by the Accreditation Commission.

*At the level of the Bachelor study*, the graduate is expected to have acquired the following theoretical knowledge: they are aware and understand the concept of the institutional socialization process in broader socio-scientific contexts; are aware of the psychological

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interpretation of human development, upbringing and education; are knowledgeable about the principles of creating and designing educational and didactic environment in secondary education; are well aware of the organizational 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 subjects specialization they teach; are ready to apply for the full teaching qualification and complete the 2nd (Master's) level of university studies.

Inseparable part of the studies and formation of the competences of will-be-teacher are also the practical abilities of the Bachelor level graduate: the graduate is able to analyze and reflect the general educational and didactic characteristics of teaching in the classroom; is able to well orientate in school legislation and school regulations and documents; can plan and organize the class activities of pupils of the respective age group (11-18-year students); is able to assist in solving professional tasks in subjects of their subject specialization; 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 orientate in scientific texts from the field of pedagogy, as well as from the relevant subjects of their specialization; effective communication within the work teams as well as groups of pupils; awareness of the possibilities and concrete ways of using modern didactic technology.

For a *Master's level graduate* in TAS the mastery of the following theoretical knowledge is required: graduate is aware of the current theoretical models of cognitive socialization and education of a man; they have acquired the basic content, methodology and epistemology of the subjects of their specialization; they are knowledgeable about the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject didactics of their specialization, 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 2<sup>nd</sup> (Master's) level graduate comprise: they are able to design and implement teaching of the relevant subjects at the level of lower and upper secondary education; can adapt educational programs in the subjects taught to the specific conditions of pupils, school classes and type of school; are able to purposefully promote the development of pupils' information literacy; can analyze and evaluate alternative programs for secondary education; know how to effectively discuss pedagogical and subject knowledge with the wider community - professionals and laics.

The complementary knowledge and abilities of the 2<sup>nd</sup> (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*).

Regarding the enforcement of graduates of the TAS study field in the labour market, this is differentiated according to the achieved level of education - 1st (Bachelor's) level graduate and 2<sup>nd</sup> (Master's) level graduate of university studies. In the description of the Study field 1.1.1 Teaching of Academic Subjects, it is stated: 1st (Bachelor's) level graduate can work as:

- assistant teacher, or teacher's assistant, educator responsible for out-of-school interest activities of children,
- state administration employee responsible for the area concerned,
- school administrative or methodological worker (according to subject specialization, e.g. manager of school libraries, computer networks, school technology and laboratory funds, and others).

2<sup>nd</sup> (Master's) level graduate can work as:

- the teacher of the relevant subjects at lower and upper secondary education;
- methodist for teaching specific subjects and subject groups;
- specialized 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 will-be-teacher acquires at the time of their undergraduate training, which represents the professional aspect of the teaching job. 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 taught in a very close link with subject didactics. In undergraduate TAS studies, the integration of theory and practice, interaction between objective and subjective knowledge, explicit and implicit knowledge is required as this is reflected in the complex of knowledge, experiences, abilities, but also in attitudes and values. 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, organizational, managerial, counseling, consulting and reflexive. Competences are a prerequisite for performing the teaching profession; their real form is reflected in teaching practice, where it gets a real, demonstrable and observable form (Lomnický - Predanociová, 2014).

The starting point for fulfilling the requirements of professionalization of the teaching profession is a systematic

approach based on 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 personality development oriented at learner development, European trends and documents focusing on the key competences of a 21<sup>st</sup> century man and the allocation of three dimensions of teacher professionalism (professional, ethical and personality).

The currently accepted 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 a set of competences 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 is a set of competences related 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 variety of teaching forms and methods, the ability to evaluate the course and achievements of the learner's education, the ability to create 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 the competences associated with the teacher himself (to plan and develop their own professional skills and self-development, the ability to identify with their professional role and school).

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 programs.

### ***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 we encounter a number of approaches to the issue (Turek, 2010, 2014; Blaško, 2016; Petlák, 2006) that coincide in the characteristics of pupil's competences stating that it is a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, ways of behavior, oriented at individual handling of personal life, social life and work responsibilities. In addition to the notion of competence, we also meet the notion the pupil's key competences. These are defined on the basis of priorities that are dominant in the society and at the same time necessary for the personal, working and social life of every person.

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 (Predanociová, 2017).

The complex of pupils' key competences is the starting point for setting teaching and learning requirements, i.e. the objectives of education and training and their transformation into different subjects. Managing these requirements assumes a well-prepared, well-trained teacher.

## **Competences of Will-Be-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 on teacher, there is a need to accentuate the field of teacher training based on the respect and need to form such 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 accented requirements.

### ***Teacher competences aimed at pupil***

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

- didactic and psychological: the teacher is able to adapt to pupil's individual needs;
- pedagogical: the teacher is aware and can orientate in the context of education and training and is able to develop individual differences of pupils;
- diagnostic and intervention: the teacher can use diagnostic instruments in the area of individual dispositions of pupils, developmental specificities, and social relations in the classroom (Vašutová, 2007).

***Ability to identify developmental and individual characteristics of a pupil.*** The basis of competences aimed at individual personality development of the pupil is the identification and awareness of their developmental and individual characteristics. In the education process of will-be-teachers for primary and secondary schools, we

differentiate 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 physical structure; acquire new dimensions of interactions with peers; emotional independence from parents and other adults; the pupil chooses a profession and prepares for the job; gets on for their responsible social behavior; develops intellectual abilities and value attitudes (Havighurst, in: Kuric, 1997).

The training of will-be-teacher - in the context of the analyzed competence, is realized mainly on 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 teacher training program 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 the pupil's individual characteristics, have a basic experience with them, and at the same time be prepared to accept each child.

***Psychological and social aspects of pupil's learning.*** Another teacher's professional competence related to the pupil's personality development, is the area of identifying psychological and social factors of pupil's learning (being aware of learning theories, diagnostics, use of different learning styles). The basis for this competence is the pedagogical rules of learning among which we include: motivation, feedback, transfer, and revision.

Slovak theoreticians (Sokolová et al., 2014), based on the research of the relationship between pupil's personality and their good school achievements, have confirmed that the psychological factors of pupil's learning are determined by the style of teacher education and

the style of pupil's learning. Knowing the individual differences, individual types and styles of teaching and learning pupils is a prerequisite for successful communication of the teacher with their pupils, creating a working climate in the class, and it also has an overall positive impact on the educational process. The will-be-teacher should have sufficient knowledge about individual differences in style factors. The most striking differences are related to perception (pupil's concentration on details in contrast with global perception); then, in identifying the match and the difference; some learners may experience problems when abstracting or generalizing, there is the difference between abstraction and concreteness; the string is also the discrepancy between impulsivity and reflexivity (an impulsive individual is fast, but often inaccurate, and reflexive one solves tasks exactly but for a long time).

***Developing pupil's personality.*** Personality development of a pupil is the priority goal of education in each school system. In the context of forming and shaping the competences of will-be-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 oriented 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, experiencing, and thinking for each individual.

Considering the mission of school, to train and educate learners, and effectively influence the potential of developing pupil's personality, we emphasize 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

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of pupils during their school attendance. Inner factors include learner psychic and physical well-being, temperament, structure and level of their intelligence, their activity, learning style of a pupil, level of their education. The pupil family background, the school educational environment, and the influence of peers or interest groups represent a set of external factors. In creating this teacher competence, we prefer two aspects: awareness of the methods for determining pupils' individual characteristics with regard to the socio-cultural environment and accepting pupils' differences without prejudices and stereotypes.

The analyzed competence is formed on the basis of the complex of *knowledge* in the field of socio-cultural background, in Slovakia, the specific knowledge of the issue of multiculturalism (Jakubovská - Predanociová, 2011) is needed. In order to develop and promote socialization (Predanociová, 2017) and possible changes in attitudes of learners, we respect three personality components: cognitive, affective and behavioral. The components are formed by the pupil under the influence of information, immediate and mediated individual and collective experiences.

The second part of the competence is the *abilities* aimed at the necessity to identify the specific educational needs of pupils in a socio-cultural context. Among them we include knowledge of methods for determining the pupil's individual characteristics with regard to their socio-cultural background, tools for judging the influence of the socio-cultural background on pupils' school achievements, the ability to draw conclusions in order to optimize teaching strategies.

#### ***Teacher competences aimed at teaching process***

In training teachers to master education, we take into account the complex of abilities among which we include: perception and evaluation of problem situations, application of appropriate methods based on analytical-critical and creative thinking, constructiveness and cooperative approach to problem solving in the classroom. The will-be-teacher has the expertise and ability to

create classroom climate, to master the content and didactics of the subject taught, to evaluate learners, to adequately use 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 will-be-teacher training is making them aware of the stated issue 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 teacher's 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 of pupils and their teachers in communication at school (Průcha - Veteška, 2012). Gercmanová, Holoušová and Urbanovská (1998) and Petlák (2006) point to the fact that school climate represents the overall quality of the school environment that affects its cultural and social dimension related to value models, level of cooperation and communication, behavior, activities. The school climate issues have been researched by a number of theoreticians; their approaches slightly vary and are influenced by various factors: school objectives, school work tasks, school education focus, conflict resolution, school leadership, contacts of school with wider community (Petlák, 2006; Janík - Švec, 2009).

Creating *the class climate* is a relatively short-term process that is situation conditioned. It is changing during the classes of the day, is specific to each class, and is determined by psychosocial relationships among different pupils. The class climate has a major impact on the overall behavior and tuning of pupils in the educational process, the performance status of the class, the learning process and the learning outcomes, but also the mental state of the teacher (Kalhoust - Obst, 2002). The class climate is created by the involvement of the whole class of pupils, groups of pupils, individual pupils and teachers who teach in the class.

Inducing 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. In the process of creating the analyzed competence in student-teachers we emphasize subject and didactic professionalism, personality qualities, ability to manage class work, openness, flexibility, implementation of methods supporting creativity and student autonomy. Part of the competence is a positive attitude to pupils, cooperation of teachers with parents, empathy, socio-communication skills and abilities.

***Mastering the content and didactics of the subjects taught.*** The competence consists of two components. The first is the subject-specific component, which includes systematic knowledge from the relevant subject field, ability to transform the knowledge into the content of the subject taught, creation of cross-curricular relations, use of information technologies. 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).

The will-be-teacher acquires this professional competence in the form of mastering the formulation of teaching goals and objectives, organizing the work in the lesson, didactic transformation of the subject matter, using the knowledge in practice as well as implementing new knowledge from the field into the subjects taught. They learn to correctly apply methods in their work with pupils, to promote their creativity and autonomy, to provide feedback in the form of appropriate use of diagnostic methods. Part of the competence is to master work with didactic text and other didactical material tools and aids and use of digital technologies (Lomnický - Jonášková - Predanociová, 2018).

***Designing and planning education.*** The competence can be considered necessary for effective and successful management of the pedagogical work of the teacher. The starting point of designing and planning is the ability to set *learning and teaching objectives*, so each teacher has to master the criteria for their generation and

creation. The definition of objectives is primarily related to the requirements that in Slovakia are currently incorporated in the Act No. 245/2008 on education and training (the School Act), setting out the general objectives of education, oriented towards the content and formatting aspect and based on the need to meet the pupil's requirements (pupil's key competences). The specific objectives result from the concretization of the general objectives and are directly related to the organization of the learning process (Gadušová et al., 2017).

In the context of the ability to design and plan the teaching process, the teacher finds himself in the role of the designer and the results of their work are permanently confronted with the degree of success and quality of education and training on the side of pupils. Disposing the competence means managing this ability at multiple levels.

*Long-term planning* is reflected in the design of a national educational program that represents the first level of the two-level education in our school system and its essential part - framework curricula. The active projecting activity of each teacher is manifested in the development of school educational programs, curricula and syllabi. The result of *medium-term planning* is the creation of thematic education and training plans and is the core of individual planning activities. Planning the model / scenario of a lesson is the result of *short-term planning*, representing everyday professional work. It is a complicated thinking process that results in a teacher's choice of the subject matter, pupil's learning activities, and teacher's teaching activities (Predanocyová, 2015).

***Selection and implementation of teaching methods and organizational work forms.*** The correct selection and application of teaching methods and forms of work with pupils 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 organizational forms represent a relatively stable variable that contributes to the creation of the atmosphere and the overall class climate.



Forming the stated professional competence of a will-be-teacher means to master its theoretical basis. The student gains orientation in variety of methods which later allow him their functional and creative use in the educational process (Kalhous-Obst, 2002; Turek, 2010), Kotrba-Lacina, 2007). It is important that we lead students to understand the reasons for choosing the methods among which we include the objectives, the content of the subject curriculum, the material and technical equipment and facilities of the school, and mental and personality predispositions of learners. The teaching process requires the teacher's appropriate response to pupils' work; it is important that will-be-teacher is also aware of the need to vary the different forms of teaching organization that promote pupils learning and are an important tool for managing and directing education.

***The use of material didactic means in the teaching process.*** The competence of using didactic means in teaching is oriented to the subject-content and didactic-methodological aspects of education. In the process of will-be-teachers education and training, it is important to understand the position and functions of these resources. The aims of education, content, methods, organizational forms of teaching, we understand as non-material didactic means that help to organize and manage the teaching process. Material didactic means, objects, serve as visuals to illustrate teaching in lessons, enable more advanced, faster and more complex learning, and acquisition of the required competences by learners more efficiently. These teaching tools have to fulfill several functions: motivational, feedback, information, fixation, and application, control (Turek, 2014).

***Evaluating the course and results of the teaching process and learning by pupils.*** School evaluation does not monitor only the achieved result but it gives an overall picture of the process that preceded the evaluation. The assessment is determined by the needs and conditions in which it is carried out and especially by its clearly formulated goals (Kolář - Šikulová, 2009). It acts as a significant motivation factor, it is the regulation instrument of the educational

process, and it affects psychological and physiological changes of the pupil, his attitudes, and socialization process.

During the undergraduate training, students are acquainted with assessment issues and are guided by the university lecturers not only in the way how to cope "technically" with the assessment, but they are also led to feel the need for evaluation objectivity, to develop their ability to interpret the results of pupil learning achievements. In Slovakia, we consider it important for the student to acquire the awareness and skills that are related to such aspects of the evaluation as: validity (suitability of the assessment tool with respect to checking the knowledge), reliability (indicator of reliability and precision), sensitivity (the indicator distinguishing pupils with good knowledge from not so bright pupils), 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).

### **Current Requirements on Education and Work of Teachers in Slovakia**

Current time has brought the new necessary requirements in the field of education and training in the Slovak Republic, which accept common aspects within the education of the European Union citizens and at the same time they prioritize education as an essential means of ensuring sustainable development. These goals and requirements are then immediately transformed into the conditions and possibilities of the Slovak school system.

The document *Europe 2020 Strategy for Education*, adopted by the European Commission in Brussels in June 2010, was a response to ensuring the stability of economic and monetary union. The strategy represents the Union's agenda for employment and growth. The topics of the Strategy are based on 3 priorities (smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth), 5 goals and 7 initiatives. One of the goals is also the area of education that aims to reduce early school leaving from the current 15% to 10% and at the same

time to increase the share of 30-34 year-olds with completed university education from 31% to min. 40%.

The Strategy represents an international framework setting out the educational objectives for the member states of the European Union. It contains basic indicators for the field of education:

- 1 rates of young people early leaving from education and training;
- 2 rates people aged 30–34 having 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*).

Achieving these indicators was evaluated in the Slovak Republic in 2017. The raising trend of young people early leaving from education (indicator 1) is cautious, as Slovakia reached 9.3% here in 2017. However, given the constantly increasing rate of early leaving from education (4.7% in 2010 and 9.3% in 2017), it is likely that the 2020 target will be at risk. Early leaving from education is significantly associated with the situation within marginalized communities and pupils, and students from a socially disadvantaged environment and it is another manifestation of the insufficient inclusion in our system of education. The insufficient inclusion within the educational system of the Slovak Republic is relatively high. It can be seen in the group of 15-year-old pupils who have shown low skills in PISA testing (indicator 3). The low inclusion rate is reported for pre-primary education, where Slovakia has quite a low participation rate (76.5% in Slovakia compared to the EU average of 96.9% and the 95% target in the Europe 2020 strategy). In the area of life-long learning of adults (indicator 6), Slovakia also has a low participation rate (3.4% in Slovakia compared to the EU average of 10.9% and 15% in the Europe 2020 strategy).

Achieving four of the six objectives in the *Europe 2020 Strategy* in the field of education is impeded or jeopardized by the insufficient inclusion in the education and training system. The *National Program for Development of Education and Training* (hereinafter NPRVV) is therefore aimed at enhancing the inclusion and integration in the existing education and training system of the Slovak Republic as a whole, from pre-primary education to adult lifelong education (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 Organization. The United Nations adopted *Agenda 2030* at the 70<sup>th</sup> General Assembly on September 25, 2015. Its objectives and related sub-objectives entered into force on January 1, 2016 and the decisions of all countries over the next 15 years will be governed by them. The key principles are transformation, integration and universality that express the intention of UNO member states to lead their development towards sustainability and to set their national policies, strategies and planning to 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, labor 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 will-be-teachers, attention should be drawn to the

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aim oriented at the quality of education, which is seen 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. As the instrument for assessing the level of achievement of the stated goals will serve such specific indicators as:

- 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 adults participation in lifelong learning (% of population aged 25-64).

The picture of the situation in Slovakia in meeting the goal aimed at 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 Program of the Slovak Republic is a long-term concept of the content of education and training from pre-primary education, through primary, and secondary, up to higher education, as well as life-long education. The strategic goals of the strategy are:

- to increase the quality of the education and training system,
- to broaden access to quality education for all, and

- to modernize the system of education - its content as well as the area of its management, funding and evaluation. (NPRVV, 2018, p. 6)

The *National Program for the Development of Education and Training* is a reaction to the real quality of education in Slovakia and a response to the current requirements on learning objectives in the context of such international documents, as *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 increase in the quality of education. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic prepared also the document entitled *The National Program for the Development of Education and Training*, which was adopted on June 7, 2018. The subtitle of the document outlines the ambition of 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 emphasizes three requirements:

1. increasing the inclusion of the school system,
2. transition to a one-structure model of education in regional 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, then, basic principles and starting points, structure and intervention logic, formulation of goals and priorities for the development of school education. The last part is an implementation plan that contains the specification of the reference frameworks, scenarios and assumptions that would respond to the overall economic and political development of the state in the implementation process.

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In the context of the education of will-be-teachers in the Slovak Republic, the three strategic objectives contained in the NPRVV document must be respected:

- 1 improving the quality of education and training;
- 2 increasing the availability of quality education and training;
- 3 modernizing 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 closely related and following one another action plans.

Regional education emphasizes the need for quality education and training, change of teacher's 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 partial goal states creation of such conditions for learners that they feel the joy from knowledge acquisition and prefer a healthy lifestyle.

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

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>QUALITY</b></p> <p>Converting quantity into quality</p>	<p>Improve the quality of educational content.</p> <p>When admitting students to study, apply selection instead of recruitment.</p> <p>Increase the quality (excellence) of science and research at universities.</p> <p>Improve the quality of the system through a new management, financing and evaluation system.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ACCESSIBILITY</b></p> <p>"The best school is the nearest school"</p>	<p>Expand the accessibility of a quality education and training system for all by promoting integration and inclusion.</p> <p>Reduce segregation rates in regional education among schools within the education level.</p>

	Completely remove dual-mode operation in regional education.
<b>MODERNIZATION</b>  Achieving current international standards	Upgrade educational content and align it with international standards (e.g. the European Qualifications Framework) Modernize 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 Program 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 Program has identified three cross-sectorial priorities:

- 1 integration and inclusion of marginalized 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
- 3 development of non-formal education (NPRVV, 2018, pp. 37-38).

NPRVV is a live document that will be revised on a regular basis in two-year cycles, and if necessary, amended depending on the state of its implementation. The revision of the strategy will be linked to the revision of the state budget expenditures, which is regularly prepared by the analytical departments of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic (NPRVV, 2018).

Considering the binding nature of the National Program 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 partial 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, text measures and ways of its implementation, timing and financial layout (NPRVV, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

The important part of teacher's competency profile is their professional development, which is linked to the performance of the profession in schools. The forming and shaping will-be-teachers competences, we have dealt with in the paper, forms the basis, the springboard for their educational work in schools. However, from the point of view of teaching theory and practice, permanent personal, professional and career development is necessary throughout the exercise of the profession, which requires lifelong learning. This helps to develop and update the whole complex of professional competences even after graduation and contributes to personality growth in the form of complex cultivation of teacher's personality, improvement and more effective professionalization of teacher's work, planning and pursuance of further education and its implementation in the pedagogical process.

The need to constantly increase the efficiency and quality of education and training of future generations in Slovakia leads to many expert discussions, but also to the intensive search for solutions. A comprehensive approach presents also the *Evaluation of Teacher Competences* project (APVV-14-0446), in which the team of experts from Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra resolves the issue of tools and instruments for evaluating the quality of teachers' work and the results of their educational and training activities. This is an area that has not been systematically studied in Slovakia so far 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 has the ambition to put into practice a

comprehensive set of evaluation tools that would simultaneously represent a set of necessary requirements - the complex of competences that are linked to the university training of will-be-teachers, while at the same time represent requirements for improving the professional work of the teacher and the need for their lifelong learning.

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