Beginnings of Competence based Training in Kindergarten Teacher and Teacher Training in Romania

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Abstract: Teacher training and development based on competence has been around for 60 years worldwide. The approach reached the Romanian teacher training in the twenty-first century and a list of competences for kindergarten teacher and teacher training was officially included in the national register of qualifications in tertiary education (RNCIS[1]) in 2012. The following study analyses the competences that are in force and relevant for kindergarten teacher and teacher training in view of the knowledge, attitude and abilities to develop. It becomes clear that organising training based on competences may be helpful in the conscious planning of the training process: it may render the educator's work more effective as well as it can help students become conscious of their professional self-development. In addition, it may be acknowledged that the competences presently listed in the national register of qualifications in tertiary education (RNCIS) are comprehensive in nature, following a plan – implement – assess approach, the defined competences being slightly subject oriented whereas performance descriptors being too general.

Keywords: competence-based training; tertiary education; teacher training

1. Introduction

A permanent attempt in teacher training has always been defining its aim, that is describing the outcome, the kind of teacher it aims to produce. Obviously in answering the question one needs to take into account various factors, as the answer depends on the expectations of the society of a certain age – the expectations towards the teachers, the values at the base of the structure of the society; the pedagogical-psychological theories on trend, the present approach in education and training, the latest findings in educational and psychological research, etc. (Györgyiné Koncz, 2005) Nevertheless, there are everlasting values, which have outlived historical ages and are continuously ensuring the effectiveness of the education and training process - e.g. the loving strictness of the educators in relationship with their students.

Answering the question is not an easy task, it needs attentive analysis. However, a reliable approach for teacher training in every age seems to be the aim to develop teachers who are able to help their students fulfil their maximum potential..

Researching the literature of the past decades on teacher training shows that researchers have approached the process of developing effective educators from different angles. Iván Falus (2006) presents international approaches extensively, what researchers found as being the key to the efficiency of educators: first the development of technical skills, then pedagogical decision making gained priority. Following a cognitive approach the development of pedagogical thinking and its role in resulting in action becomes the focus of research, leading to an interest in researching and developing pedagogical knowledge, attitudes and views. Several studies research the attributes of effective educators as well as their basic abilities.

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[1] RNCIS – Romanian for: Registrul Național al Calificărilor din Învățământul Superior- national registry of qualifications in tertiary education

The idea and need for a competence-based teacher training came about in the 1960 – 1970s in the USA, where the importance was asserted to describe in detail the aim of teacher training, the level of performance a novice and an experienced teacher should possess (Diaconu, 2002). Organizing teacher training based on competences, defining expectations more precisely made it possible for teaching as an occupation to become more professional, unsuitable individuals being filtered out.

Teaching becoming a profession with measureable standards available brings about asking basic questions. Emil Păun (2002), in addition to considering description of teaching standards important, points out that, although knowledge and skills needed to practise teaching can be clearly defined, there are some creativity factors related to the teaching profession that cannot be standardized: e.g. attitude, value and calling. Teaching situations are, on the one hand, ritualized, with definable standards that can be put into practice. However, on the other hand, they can be unpredictable, unique and complex so that the teaching process will need creative use of professional knowledge, skills and abilities, which relies on critical thinking, hipothesizing, decision making and foreseeing, and those are difficult to standardize.

2. Competence-based teacher training

Prior to describing kindergarten teacher and teacher training based on developing competences in more detail, we shall define the concepts of competence and pedagogical competence.

2.1. Concept of competence

The concept of competence has several different usage in everyday language. It derives from Latin *competentia* (cognizance, jurisdiction) and *competo* (able to do something). Thus competence implies *decision making* as well as *executing*, putting decision into practice. An individual is competent if they have authority in a certain field and consequently they are able to take decisions (e.g. a head teacher, while being the representative of an institution, may decide if they sign an agreement with an other institution or not), furthermore, a person is competent if they have suitable knowledge or know-how in a certain field of profession, which puts them in a position to be able to execute tasks, solve problems related to that specific field (e.g. psychologists or psychiatrists are able to treat psychological traumas).

József Nagy (2000) researches the structure of competence. According to him, competence is a part system of personality, on the one hand, cognitive (knowledge, skills and abilities), on the other hand urging and regulating (routines, patterns and motifs) system of idiosyncracies. At the same time, competence is a building block of personality. In Nagy's view personality consists of four basic competences, personal (aimed at an individual's survival), social (aimed at the survival of society), cognitive (aimed at processing information), as well as special competences, which are necessary for effectively performing in an occupation. The four fields of competence are interrelated, as common areas can be defined, e.g. the level of cognitive competence may define de level of development of personal, social as well as special competences.

2.2. Pedagogical competence

Different researchers approach the concepts of competence and pedagogical competence from different angles. However, there are several common points and resemblances among the core definitions.

Following József Nagy's (2000) definition, pedagogical competence is a special competence with interralated fields of personal, social and cognitive competences. Structurally, it is a system of knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as the motifs sparking those into action. Figure 1 illustrates the necessity of such skills, abilities and motifs that belong primarily to personal, social and cognitive competences. In order to perform their job as teachers and educators effectively, educators must possess developed personal competence: real self-knowledge, mental health, self-reflection ability, adequate self-confidence and self-esteem. As education is based on social interaction, educators must also possess highly developed social competence: helpfulness, co-operation, good social communication skills, leadership and management skills. In addition, to perform their teaching tasks educators must also possess personality components belonging to cognitive competence: abilities of

aquiring knowledge, thinking, cognitive communication, etc. Nevertheless, there are pieces of knowledge, skills, abilities and motifs which are related exclusively to the process of teaching, which belong to the pedagogical competence.
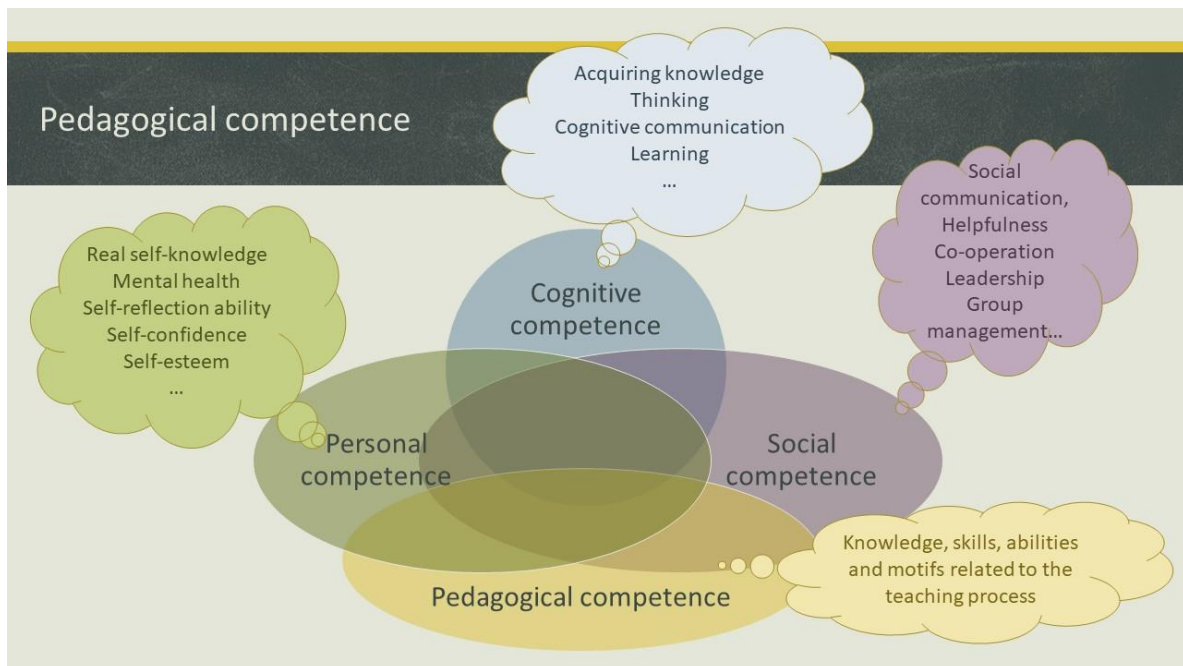

Figure 1. Pedagogical competence and its interrelated fields (original compilation based ont he theory of Nagy József (2000))

According to Mihai Diaconu (2002), pedagogical competence generally means the ability of educators to act in different teaching situations based on their knowledge of the factors and patterns in the process of teaching, while, more precisely it means that they are able to fulfil their tasks adequately, as expected by the profession (Szabó-Thalmeiner, 2009).

According to Iván Falus (2005) pedagogical competence is the mix of such knowledge, views and practical skills that allow educators to effectively perform their tasks in a certain field, while being adequately motivated to pledge themselves to apply all the above in practice. The definition of pedagogical competence defines the qualification requirements, has an effect on the views at play in the teaching process, its course, curriculum and methods. The competence is still defined too generally. In order to be helpful in defining qualification requirements in education we need to define the structure of the competence, define the pedagogical standards. The standards define the levels of competence, are usefully specific, explicit and assessable, providing clear basis for assessment in order to award qualification in a reliable, consistent way, irrespective of the institution awarding qualification.

2.3. Beginnings of competence-based teacher training

As stated before, competence-based teacher training appeared in the 1960 -1970's in the USA (Stanley, 1971, Rosner, 1972). The main aim was raising the profession's prestige through filtering out incompetent educators, as well as providing teacher training and development with helpful criteria through defining qualification requirements. At the same time, there is a tendency to distinguish between novice and experienced teachers, which results in setting up two non-profit organizations[2] in 1987 that define the standards of qualification for different levels of educators as a result of research and co-operation lasting for several years (Kelly, 2002).

The European Union has been supporting quality improvement in teacher training since the 2000's and thus favourable conditions are created for elaborating competences for teacher training (Milotay, 2004,

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[2] National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) defines qualification standards for professionals; Interstate New Teacher Assessment Support Consortium (INTASC) for novice teachers

Şerbănescu, 2010, 41). Next, the qualification requirements for teacher training in Hungary will be presented, followed by the list of competences for kindergarten teacher - primary school teacher training in Romania, similarities and diferences between the two being pointed out.

2.4. Qualification requirements in Hungarian teacher training – an example of applying competences in practice

Qualification requirements in teacher training appeared and were officially accepted in 2006, as worked out by a group of professionals[3] headed by Iván Falus at ELTE PPK. Competences in the teaching profession were defined in eight areas:
1. Developing learner personality, applying individual approach.
2. Developing learner groups and communities.
3. Didactics and subject knowledge.
4. Teaching process planning.
5. Learning process support, management and control.
6. Teaching process and learner evaluation.
7. Communication, professional co-operation and career awareness.
8. Autonomy and responsibility.

These areas are further broken down into their components. For example, in the case of the above mentioned second field of competence it is important for educators to be aware of the psychological, sociological and cultural peculiarities of groups and group development in order to create a teaching environment that would urge group members to take responsibility for their close and wider communities, to actively participate in the life of their society. As a consequence three further areas are defined:
2.1. Group development and community values.
2.2. Creating opportunities in schools and teaching practice.
2.3. Inter- and multi-culturalism.

The planning of the teacher training process, as well as the assessment of the results achieved by students is supported by the requirements specifically defined for the subsequent areas which are described by identifying knowledge, attitude/views and skills (in accordance with the competence definitions presented above). For example, *group development and community values* sub area is suitable for developing the following knowledge, attitudes and skills:
- ”knowledge - knowledge of methods for learning about the social characteristics of the learner groups and individual learners.
- Attitude/view – commitment to building communities and tendency to support learner self-organization
- Skills – ability to actively involve learners in community building and development, increasing learner role in initiating the process.” (Teacher training qualification requirements, 2006)

The detailed requirements are important for professional educators in teacher training as they can be helpful in curriculum development, selection of content material for specific subjects, as well as the choice of methods and techniques applied.

3. Competence-based teacher training in Romania

3.1. Attempts to develop competence-based teacher training in Romania

The national authority responsible for qualifications (Autoritatea Naţională a Calificărilor) features on its website (http://www.anc.edu.ro/standarde-ocupationale/) qualification standards for kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers and teachers that were compiled in 1999. The lists define six areas of competence for the above mentioned professionals in the field of education: communication (teacher-

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[3] Members of the group of professionals: Andrea Dömsödy, Iván Falus, Orsolya Kálmán, Beáta Kotschy, Judit Szivák, László Trencsényi.

student, teacher-teacher), curriculum, professional development, assessment, learner development and the relationships between family, school and community. The fields of competence define items of competence and performance criteria. Although the pedagogical standards defined serve mostly teacher assessment purposes, they could be used for organizing purposes of the teacher training process based on competences.

The need for standards in teacher training and development came about at the beginning of the 2000's. In 2001-2002, the council responsible for teacher training in the Ministry of Education and Research, in a project supported by the World Bank and The Romanian Government, requests the founding president of NBPTS[4], James A. Kelly to take part as an expert in working out the standards, as well as analyse the situation of teacher training and development in Romania. The project set up workshops of groups of professional educators in which standards for primary school teachers, mathematics teachers and the definitive degree in education exam were defined (Gliga, 2002).

Certain elements of competence-based teacher training may be found in the curriculums for the subjects of secondary school pedagogy and psychology (Curricula for school pedagogy and psychology 2002). Those documents define the aims of the teaching process on the level of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Although organising the curriculum around competences is pioneering in Romanian teacher training and provides support for the professionals in teacher training with the detailed definitions, it is still knowledge centered and too general with regard to values and attitudes.

As an individual initiative, a list of competences is adapted in 2007 for use in Hungarian language kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher training in Romania as part of a doctoral thesis (Szabó-Thalmeiner, 2009). While compiling the list of competences qualification requirements in Hungarian teacher training (2006), lists of competences compiled in the USA (Middle/Early Childhood/Generalist Standards, 2001, Model Standards for Beginning… 1992), as well as the UK (Standards for the Award… 2001) were used, and a list of competences was suggested in which the basic competence areas used for describing qualification requirements were broken down into subsequent areas defined along the knowledge, attitude/view, skills axis. The resulting list of competences was compared with the curriculum for kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher training at Babeș-Bolyai University, and suggestions were made for the improvement of every competence area within the subjects as well as the activities to be applied.

3.2. Official list of competences for tertiary kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher training in Romania[5] (2021/2022)

The National Register of Qualifications in Tertiary Education publishes the officially accepted competences list for kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher training in 2012, which defines nine competence areas, of which six are professional and three are cross-disciplinary.

The six professional competences establish skills in the following fields:
C1. Pedagogical process planning for different age groups.
C2. Implementing kindergarten and primary school teaching-educating processes.
C3. Assessment of pedagogical processes and learners at kindergarten and school levels.
C4. Learner group, community building development, learning management.
C5. Education counselling.
C6. Autonomy and responsibility assumption, considering professional practice.

The three cross-disciplinary competences aim at establishing the following fields:
CDC1. Applying ethical norms, values, principles in force in the fields of the pedagogical sciences while working as a professional in pedagogy.
CDC2. Co-operation skills in professional workshops for implementing various pedagogical projects.
CDC3. Lifelong learning for continuous professional development.

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[4] See footnote nr. 1.

[5] It was modified in september 2022 at Babes-Bolyai University.

Surveying the professional competences, it is clear that the first three competence areas follow the theoretical approach to the teaching process of plan-implement-assess. An analysis of the details of the three basic competences shows that concerning all three competence areas teachers are expected to know the didactics of their specific subjects, to acknowledge learner specificity at different ages, as well as to be aware of the curriculum. At the same time it is expected with all three competence fields of teachers to apply their knowledge of the subject matter, psycho-pedagogy and methodology. Performance description focuses mainly on knowledge and its implementation, describing skills, attitudes/views is missing.

The fourth competence area, which refers to group management, focuses mainly on learning management knowledge and applying it in practice, rather than on community development.

The fifth professional competence refers to educational counselling. Performance descriptors making up the field are: enhancing learners to accommodate to school, rejecting discrimination, acting in fair play, analysing and solving problems, assissting safe keeping. It is within this field that knowledge on educational areas are to be found: entrepreneurship, knowledge of social education and education for health applied in pracice with a view to develop children's problem solving skills. This area also focuses mainly on information and practical knowledge.

The last, sixth professional competence refers to self-assessment, reflexive thinking and while detailing it we may come across an attitude and a skill: educators should feel the need for further training, as well as act reflexively throughout their pedagogical practice. The following performance descriptors, similarly to the previously enumerated competences, refer mostly to the professional knowledge and putting the acquired knowledge into practice: use of self-assessment methods and tools, use of research methodology knowledge while researching educational problems, draw up projects aiming at personal development based on the research findings, apply personal knowledge while analysing and interpreting subject matter concepts.

While analysing the professional competences one may notice that during the detailing of the competence areas knowledge and knowledge application in practice are focused on rather than skills, views/attitudes. Competence areas are subject specific, following the content logic of the subjects used in kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher training.

The three cross-disciplinary competences refer to ethical behaviour, professional communication skill and cooperation, as well as continuous professional development. However, a detailing of the mentioned competence areas is missing.

Comparing teacher training qualification requirements in Hungary with the list of competences for kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers in Romania, there are a number of similarities and a few differences that can be noticed. First we are looking at the fields of the two requirements lists, noting their overlapping (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparison of teacher training qualification requirements in Hungary with the list of competences for kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers in Romanian tertiary education

Teacher training qualification requirements in Hungary (2006)	List of competences for kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers in Romanian tertiary education (2012)
1. Developing learner personality, applying individual approach.	Knowledge of learners' age specificity is taken into consideration while defining K1, K2, K3
2. Developing learner groups and communities.	K4. A tanulói csoportok, közösségek alakulásának fejlesztése, tanulásszervezés.
3. Didactics and subject knowledge.	While defining K1, K2, K3 knowledge of didactics and subject methodology is required.
4. Teaching process planning.	K1. Pedagogical process planning for different age groups.
5. Learning process support, management and control.	K2. Implementing kindergarten and primary school teaching-educating processes.
6. Teaching process and learner evaluation.	K3. Assessment of pedagogical processes and

	learners at kindergarten and school levels.
7. Communication, professional co-operation and career awareness.	TK2. Co-operation skills in professional workshops for implementing various pedagogical projects
8. Autonomy and responsibility.	K6. Autonomy and responsibility assumption, considering professional practice.
	K5. Education counselling.
	TK1. Applying ethical norms, values, principles in force in the fields of the pedagogical sciences while working as a professional in pedagogy.
	TK3. Lifelong learning for continuous professional development.

Following Table 1, it can be asserted that, while defining the teaching qualification requirements is mainly based on the learner, as well as the development of the learner's community, the Romanian competence list features as its first three professional competences ones that build the plan-implement-assess axis. These competences (K1, K2, K3) totally overlap the teacher qualification requirements competence fields 4, 5 and 6. In the Romanian system there is no specific reference to developing learner personality, individual treatment of learners (1), knowledge of subject and subject methodology (3). However, while defining the competences, it becomes clear that such specific knowledge and its use in practice is expected requirement during the planning, implementing and assessing phases of the teaching process. Although it may seem that *developping the formation of learner groups and communities* (2 and K4) is similarly expected requirement in both training systems, slight differences can still be noticed, as in the Romanian training competence list there is more focus on learning and group management rather than on community development. The competence of *autonomy and responsibility assumption* can be found in both lists (8 and K6) with the difference that in the Romanian list of competences it is complemented with the ability to reflect on the teaching practice, which somewhat overlaps the competence field of *Assessment of pedagogical processes* (K3).

Education counselling (K5) on the Romanian list of professional competences is not a separate item on the Hungarian qualification requirements list.

On analyzing the cross-disciplinary competences we may notice that in the Romanian kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher training there are the separate competence requirements *Applying ethical norms, values, principles in force in the fields of the pedagogical sciences while working as a professional in pedagogy* (TK1) and *Lifelong learning for continuous professional development* (TK3), which are not singled out on the Hungarian list of requirements. Nevertheless, TK3 (*Lifelong learning for continuous professional development*) partly overlaps K6 (*Autonomy and responsibility assumption, considering professional practice*) professional competence, as teachers assuming responsibility for their personal, professional development will continuously train and develop themselves. TK2 (*Co-operation skills in professional workshops for implementing various pedagogical projects*) partially overlaps with the field in the 7th position in the Hungarian list of qualification requirements *Communication, professional co-operation and career awareness*, as it does not stress good communication skills or career awarenes as separate competences.

Summing up, it may be stated that the two training requirements systems define broadly similar areas while there is obvious difference in their approach to the process: defining the qualification requirements in teacher training in Hungary is based on the child, the learner community (following the American standards), whereas the Romanian list of competences for kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher training focuses on the stages of the teaching process.

Another obvious difference between the two documents is their degree of elaboration: while the Hungarian teacher training qualification requirements elaborate in detail the eight requirements to the level of knowledge – skill – attitude, the detailing of the competences used in Romanian kindergarten teacher, primary school teacher training is less elaborate, contains generalizations and focuses on knowledge and its use in practice, rather than on defining skills and attidue. Detailing of the cross-

disciplinary competences is missing altogether, probably due to the view that those are ones that can be standardized with more difficulty.

4. The role of competences in the practice of teacher training

The level of detailing of the competences may greatly influence the effectiveness of teacher training as competences have an overall impact on the process.

As may be seen in Figure 2, subjects that are to be included in the curriculum are selected with a view to the competences to be developed. Educators use the competences to plan their teaching at the beginning of the school year: select what competences to focus on within their subject, identify the performance descriptors, select subject material, select methods, techniques and activities that will enhance competence development, as well as they develop the forms of assessment for their subject. Effective training cannot lack teamwork, co-operation and communication among educators, so that they may assume certain roles in developing specific competences, and thus preventing possible omissions during the course.

The list of competences compiled for the course may be helpful during final assessment, the degree exam, as it is at that point that the effectiveness of the training can be measured. It is to be expected from degree students to possess knowledge, attitudes and skills characteristic to each competence area. They may serve as the basis on which exam subjects, exam questions and tasks, as well as assessment guidelines may be compiled.

The acquired competences are also listed on the degree diploma after completing the course, providing future employers with useful information on the skills of the novice teacher.
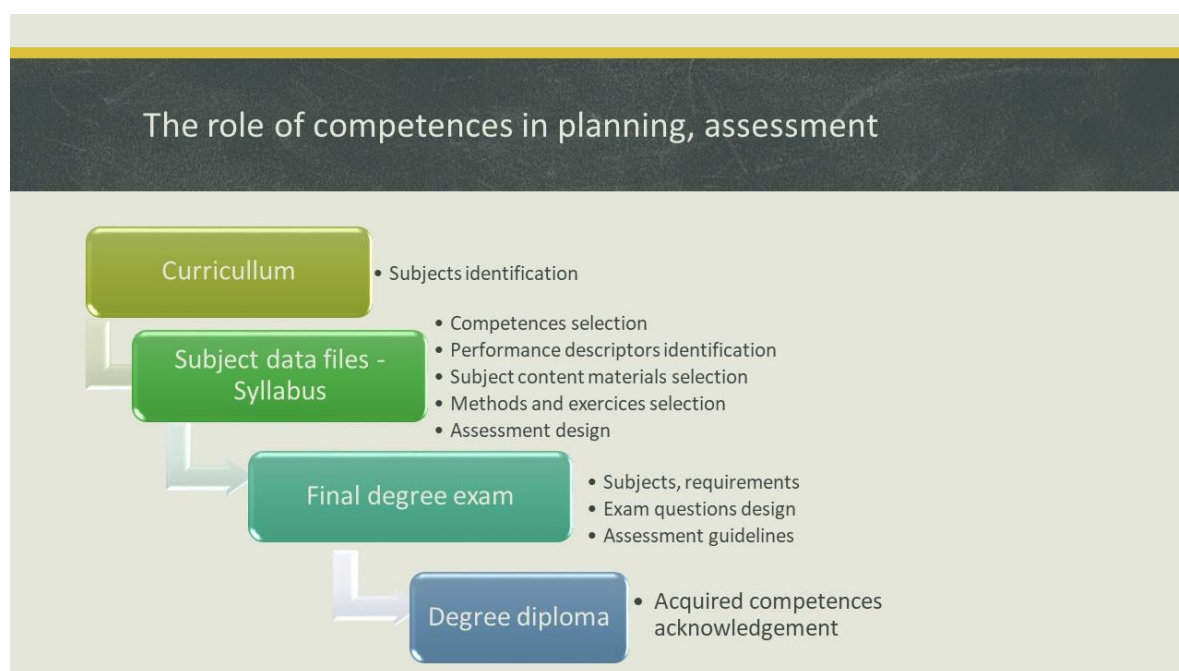

Figure 2. The role of competences in teacher training (original compilation)

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Competence based teacher training is undoubtedly helpful for planning, implementing and assessing the training course. An awareness of the competences to develop in learners makes the work of educators providing the training more efficient as they will select the content, methods and assessment forms based on the competences to develop, as well as model the appropriate teacher views and attitudes.

The official competences defined for kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher in the Romanian National Register of Qualifications in Tertiary Education (RNCIS) are comprehensive, following the course of plan-implement-assess, with a knowledge of age characteristics, as well as subject, didactics and psycho-pedagogical special knowledge. Performance descriptors tend to be too general, the detailing of cross-disciplinary competences is missing and information and applying knowledge in practice is focused on, while views/attitudes and skills are defined in less detail. The question arises whether educators implicated in the training use those consciously, and, to what extent those will influence the training course.

In order to ensure training efficiency and a conscious use of competences, the defined competences should be further detailed on the level of knowledge-attitude-skill. Following that, competences should be matched with appropriate subject content, and activities aimed at developing those competences should be worked out.

The level of competence acquired could be measured against a development portfolio, for which component portfolio items would have to be defined. Teachers of several practical subjects choose portfolios to assess their students. Competence development and assessment could be taken into account in teacher training as well.

Detailed qualification standards should be available to educators by the end of the teacher training course to define the level of qualification to be achieved by graduating students in certain competence areas. It is common knowledge that teacher competences will develop with practical experience. One cannot expect freshly graduated novice teachers to possess the level of competences of teachers with several years of experience.

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