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Undergraduate preparation of future teachers in the context of reading literacy in the Czech Republic

Abstract

The present paper focuses on the undergraduate preparation of future teachers in the context of reading literacy. The paper consists of a theoretical part and an empirical part. The theoretical part describes and defines the basic concepts closely related to the topic, including undergraduate preparation of future teachers, reading literacy, etc. The empirical part describes an analysis of the current study programs at the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. The objective of the present paper was to analyse the study programs and perform a comparison with expiring study programs aimed at reading literacy. The authors performed a qualitative research study to answer whether undergraduate preparation of future teachers at Palacký University Olomouc in the context of reading literacy is sufficient and if study plans of educational programs reflect the requirements of pedagogical practice. The research was performed using document analysis.

Secondary document analysis refers to data already collected (Donnellan, Lucas, 2013). According to Hendl (2005), the purpose of qualitative analysis is non-numerical data organisation in order to reveal topics, regularity, relationships, and quality. In this context, the term non-numeric applies not only to the data but also to data handling. According to the preliminary research, a relatively large proportion of future teachers lack practical teacher training aimed at subject-specific didactics, which is also based on reading literacy. Due to the ongoing pandemic in COVID-19, it was necessary to respond to the methods and forms of work to develop reading literacy through

distance learning. The authors of the present paper believed it was essential to analyse the study programs in the context of reading literacy and answer the question of whether undergraduate preparation of future teachers is sufficient and if study plans of educational programs reflect the requirements of pedagogical practice in terms of reading literacy, using the content mentioned above analysis of documents. It followed from the results of the research investigation that the study plans of the educational programmes reflect the requirements of educational practice. Even though we have described the facts in the contribution, we believe that the reading literacy development issue is paid sufficient attention to based on the analysis of study plans in teaching for the 1st stage of primary school. Although the term “reading literacy” is mentioned in the curricular documents FEP PE only marginally, in the study plans for future primary school teachers, the term “reading literacy” appears in several disciplines. It is undoubtedly debatable to what extent the above disciplines will respond to reading literacy development in students. Judging by the content of the plans, their purpose is to provide future teachers with the competencies that support the development of reading literacy in primary school children following pre-literacy in pre-primary education. The disciplines are purely of a didactic focus because they appear in the third grade of study and higher grades after the students have completed relevant theoretical preparation.

Keywords: undergraduate preparation, future teacher, reading literacy, analysis, subject-specific didactics, the Czech Republic.

1. Introduction

The teacher has always been one of the key actors in the area of training and education. In order to make any positive changes in the system of education, we must start with the teacher because any reforms aimed at improving the school depend on the teachers’ willingness to change the concept of teaching, their attitudes to the learners and working methods, and last but not least their personality, abilities, and level of education (Šimoník, 1995). The term future teacher shall mean a teacher training student in the last year of study. The term future teacher is closely related to the term beginning teacher. Šimoník (1995, p. 9) claims,

A beginning teacher is a teacher in the first year of teaching. The first year in school is a year of confrontation between the ideas and ideals of the young teacher and the often harsh reality, a year of confrontation between the teacher’s preparation and the real performance of the profession, confrontation between theory and practice.

Every teacher must cope with the internal transformation of the school and society. The teacher passes on the changes to other people. Chudý (2014) believes that in this context, the teacher should have the following roles: class manager, a diagnostician of the student’s learning styles, consultant, educator, and facilitator of learning. The teacher should also be the innovator and modifier of the processes and be creative. For a beginning teacher to fulfil these roles, undergraduate preparation should focus on specific capacities and competencies. These competencies and capacities are based on several traits. According to Chudý, these traits include the following: personal dispositions of the teacher, the teacher’s actions and behaviour, the educational style of the teacher, the

concept of the teaching process, results of the teaching process, teacher-student interaction, or the teacher's interpersonal style. The teacher's personality is essential, and according to Dytrtová (2009) in Krpálek, Kadaňová (2014) depends on the most important components such as mental resilience, i.e. the ability to cope with stress, or the ability to insight into the core of problematic situations. Other important aspects are adaptability, adjustability, flexibility in thinking and the ability to improvise. The last two components include the ability to learn new knowledge as a prerequisite for fast and effective learning, for handling changes, for prudential regulation of one's internal and external activity, and for social empathy and communication, i.e. the ability to attract and maintain attention. According to the above, the personality can be understood as an organic system of individual abilities, skills, knowledge, competencies, experiences, personality traits, and behaviours of an individual. The personality of the teacher transforms and shapes in the long term. This process can be defined as developing professional identity because identity is not a finished product. This professional identity changes over time and under the influence of social and anthropological contexts associated with humans and their development. New experiences and learning new situations change the structure of the teacher's identity (Chudý, 2014). This section of the text will describe the stages of the teacher's professional journey. Even though many authors define these stages differently, the present paper will focus on the stages defined by Špendla (1974) in Chudý (2014). According to Špendla, the stages of the teacher's professional journey are as follows: orientation stage (pre-professional stage); preparatory phase (specialised teacher training); adaptation stage (the first employment and the first career steps); integration stage (shaping of the teacher's personality); and stabilisation stage (balance between the teacher's professional activities and performance). The key competencies have become the core concept of school-based education. These competencies include knowledge, skills, and abilities that are not activity-specific but provide the opportunity to be active in many functions and positions and to cope with the changes in one's occupational life (Veteška et al., 2017). "A competent individual has the abilities, knowledge, skills, habits, experiences, and motivation to do what is expected and required in the respective professional area in a qualified and high-quality manner" (Krpálek, Kadaňová, 2014, p. 19). According to Tremblay et al. (2002) and Veteška et al. (2017), the competencies include the following: contextualisation (embedded in a particular environment or related to a particular situation); multidimensionality (consists of a variety of resources, assumes effective management of these resources which are linked to the basic dimensions of human behaviour, i.e. competences contain behaviours and are reflected in behaviours, see Figure 1); and the potential for action and development (competences are acquired and developed in the process of education and learning).

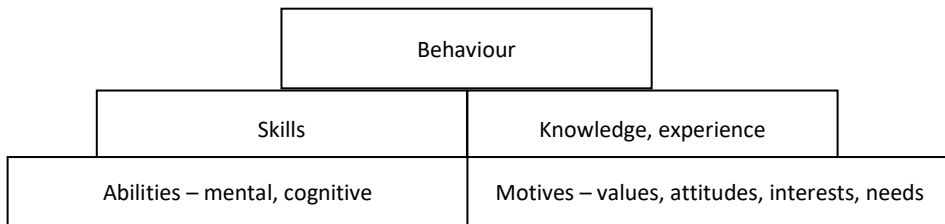


Figure 1

Hierarchical model of the competence structure

Source: Veteška et al. (2017), p. 19.

For the present paper, the most important are professional competencies. Every university should help future teachers develop their professional competencies to enable the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the teaching process. Professional preparation of future teachers includes a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired in the following courses: general education, general and school didactics, communication skills, and educational diagnostics (Nábělková, 2020). Scholarly literature describes several approaches to classifying the teacher's professional competencies. Kyriacou proposed a traditional classification system that reflects the educational process stages.

Similarly to Kyriacou (2012), Králová et al. (2018) believe that these skills are related to planning and preparation, i.e. didactic skills associated with the selection of the content and objectives of the lessons and other educational units, selection of adequate methods, means, and tools. Lesson planning should be based on effective communication and adequate learner involvement. The purpose of communication is to present the learning content comprehensibly, while learner involvement is achieved through activating methods. Kyriacou (2012) emphasises the skills associated with lesson management. The essential components of class management include time management, class atmosphere monitoring, and flexible lesson organisation based on observations and the development of *a positive class climate*. Using their social skills, teachers can diagnose and influence class relationships. In this respect, the teacher should act as an essential socialising agent who determines the form of the social climate implicitly, i.e. through his/her personality, but also explicitly by defining rules and principles of observing them. It is because classroom discipline is necessary for the teacher to maintain attention and resolve undesirable behaviours. Because classroom climate should be maintained positively, teacher-student interaction is essential. The teacher shows respect and trust for the student. Other significant skills are related to diagnosis and self-diagnosis (Kyriacou, 2012). Gillernová (2012) proposed a comprehensive model relating to the teacher's professional skills.

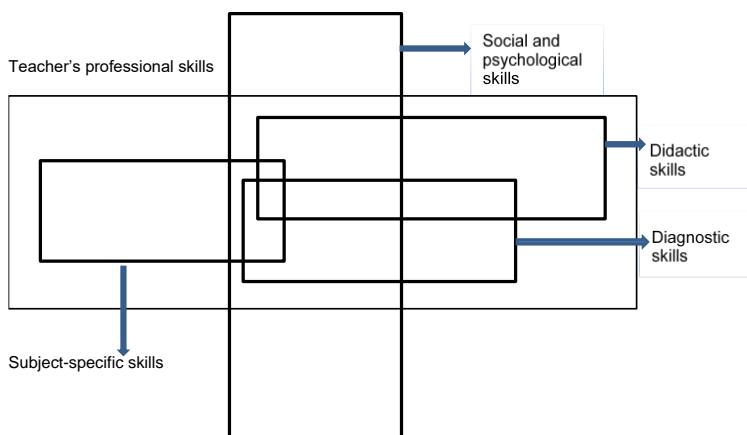


Figure 2

Teacher's professional skills according to Gillernová, 2003, p. 85.

This scheme suggests that the teacher's subject-specific skills are linked to the learning content. In this area, university teachers usually do not show any deficiencies. The teacher's didactic skills determine how to mediate specific knowledge to students adequately. The teacher's diagnostic skills are essential in assessing students' written or oral tests and evaluating the effectiveness of the education process. From the perspective of educational psychology, social skills support the involvement of the remaining types of skills, especially diagnostic skills. One of the teaching profession's key issues is preparing future teachers. University study should reflect the new perspective on the institution's role, the teacher, and the teaching process. Šimoník (1995, p. 3) states, "The teacher should primarily be an expert in the process of training and education and should be able to support the student's development professionally and sensitively." In most universities, the preparation of future teachers is primarily theoretical. Future teachers lack practical skills.

For this reason, there is a considerable contradiction between university training and reality in schools. After university graduates start teaching, they encounter both objective and subjective problems. They mainly address these problems with uncertainty, doubts, and frequent errors. Šimoník (1995, p. 8) believes that "No university can prepare a perfect and 'ready-made' professional." Teachers become real professionals only after several years of experience. Especially in the first years, teachers try to overcome some difficulties related to the new profession, their previous theoretical preparation in university, and last but not least, their educational experience. Chudý (2014) believes that the preparation system of future teachers requires methods and strategies that will benefit the teacher and will be indispensable in the educational process and consistent with the society's objectives.

Modern schools outperform traditional directive education and focus on the central needs of the current society. The problems of a beginning teacher are summarised by Šimoník (1995, p. 33) as follows: “A young person with a ‘fresh’ university diploma in the pocket is not a ‘ready-made’ teacher. Although the beginning teacher performs all of the usual activities that pertain to the teaching profession, we can hardly expect everything to be done perfectly.” Klement (1969, p. 176) refers to beginning teachers’ problems: “A low level of linguistic expression, deformed handwriting, methodological incompetence, unawareness of school administration, uncertainty in resolving educational issues, in marking, and in communication with parents.” These authors have a similar perspective on the problems of beginning teachers. It is generally known that despite years of experience, teachers make mistakes, and they make mistakes just as beginning teachers. The teacher is one of the main actors in the education process and is responsible for the entire process’s preparation, management, organisation, and results. It is essential for future teachers to understand the importance of interpersonal relationships and communication and to realise that a degree of tension in the educational interaction is part of the educational process (Šmelová, Fasnerová, 2011).

Regarding the paper’s topic, the abovementioned competencies should correspond with the applicable curricular document (FEP EE). Due to the current way of education (distance), it is necessary to constantly develop and strengthen reading literacy at the 1st level of primary school. Educators have been forced to change the methods and forms of work that develop reading. The following text describes the preparation of future teachers and an analysis of the disciplines that correspond with reading literacy competencies. Specifically, the authors focus on future teachers from the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc. The text describes the courses in which future teachers are trained in reading literacy and acquire the professional competencies mentioned above.

2. Methodology

The authors performed a qualitative research study to answer the question: Is the undergraduate preparation of future teachers at the Palacký University in Olomouc sufficient in the context of reading literacy? The research was performed using document analysis. Secondary document analysis refers to data already collected (Donnellan, Lucas, 2013). For our research, these were the accreditation documents for the fields in which future teachers study. The text below describes in which courses future teachers are trained in reading literacy and in which courses they acquire the required professional competencies. According to Hendl (2005), the purpose of qualitative analysis is non-numerical

data organisation to reveal topics, regularity, relationships, and quality. In this context, the term non-numeric applies not only to the data but also to data handling. The results of the content analysis of the documents are specified in the text below.

3. Results

This study is a pilot study within the IGA project, and therefore, we present only partial results.

Course: Literature and youth

Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- Define the content and functions of literature for children and youth;
- Explain the specifics of literature for children and youth;
- Clarify the role of literature for children and youth in terms of the development of **reading literacy**;
- Define the characterise literary genres for children and youth;
- Evaluate the works of the most important Czech and foreign authors of literature for children and youth;
- Analyse and interpret artistic texts in the context of the authors' works and period of origin;
- Formulate and present one's interpretation of a selected book for children and youth;
- Assess the quality of literary work for children and youth.

Subject: Didactics of elementary reading and writing

Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- Define the terms perception, school maturity, school readiness, teaching

Course: Didactics of Literature Education

Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- Assess and evaluate the communication concept of literary education;
- Demonstrate the link between literary education and cross-curricular subjects of FEP EE;
- Assess the possibilities for the development of **reading strategies** in primary school children;
- Analyse and apply the principles of receptive aesthetics in the teaching process;

Clarify the stages of the development of **reading**;

- Use activating methods and methods that develop **reading literacy** in the teaching process;
- Demonstrate the ability to select an appropriate text for didactic interpretation;
- Propose a procedure for a didactic interpretation of an artistic text;
- Justify the benefit of artistic literature for children's personality development;
- Design and implement a complete lesson plan.

Subject: Fundamentals of reading literacy for primary school children

Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- method, analytical-synthetic method, methodological procedures, handwriting models in contemporary school, **reading literacy**;
- Clarify the relationships between auditory and visual perception, school readiness and school maturity depending on **elementary reading and writing**. Clarify the relationships between the current handwriting models used in elementary school;
 - Explain the significance of perception, school readiness, and school maturity for both the pupil and the teacher;
 - List and characterise the different types of perception, school readiness, and school maturity;
 - Assess school maturity and school readiness of children in the elementary grade following their graphomotor skills and **pre-reading skills**;
 - Assess the quality and difficulty of textbooks aimed at **reading** and writing (live alphabets, alphabet books, reading books, writing books);
 - Apply the analytical-synthetic teaching method (genetic and global) in teaching elementary reading and writing;
 - Analyse and evaluate textbooks and learning texts according to specific criteria.

Course: Didactics of Czech Language 2

Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- Understand the structure of FEP EE, be able to describe the content and structure of communication and stylistic education for primary school;
- Practically demonstrate the knowledge of the methods, forms, and exercises used in communication and stylistic education and apply them to a specific learning content;
- Use supportive didactic tools in teaching the Czech language and its innovations;
- Know of and be able to apply selected methods to develop **reading literacy** among primary school pupils;

- Define the concept of **reading literacy** and describe the development models and levels of literacy;
- Characterise the international reading literacy assessment programmes PIRLS and PISA;
- Characterise the process of text comprehension;
- Understand the development of text comprehension, adapt and be able to apply the method of developing **reading literacy**;
- Learn about the methods and strategies that develop critical thinking and activities to link the different educational areas according to FEP for primary schools.

Course: Teaching practice with reflection

Objectives:

Upon completion of the course, the students will be able to:

- Define the specifics of the first grade of elementary school;
- Demonstrate the relationships between auditory and visual perception, school readiness and school maturity depending on elementary reading and writing;
- Clarify the relationships between the current handwriting models used in elementary school;
- Test children's graphomotor and pre-reading skills under the leadership of a teacher trainer;
- Analyse the quality and difficulty of textbooks aimed at reading and writing

- Know of and be able to apply selected activating methods in the educational field of Czech Language and Literature;
 - Demonstrate the ability to integrate the different components of the educational field and other educational areas;
 - Clarify the process of assessment of written and spoken communications and apply the knowledge in practice;
 - Plan and implement language teaching from thematic plans to specific lessons;
 - Integrate selected learning contents of specific subjects and their components;
 - Integrate the educational area Language and Language Communication with other areas and cross-curricular subjects by means of worksheets or projects.
- (live alphabets, alphabet books, reading books, writing books);
 - Test and apply the analytical-synthetic teaching method (genetic and global) in teaching elementary reading and writing;
 - Perform an analysis of elementary grade children with respect to postponement of school attendance;
 - Describe the relationship between postponement of school attendance and subsequent performance in the elementary grade.

4. Conclusions

The above suggests that the educational programmes' study plans reflect the educational practice requirements. Even though we have described the fact, we believe, based on the analysis of study plans in teaching for the 1st stage of primary school, that the issue of reading literacy development is paid attention to. Although the term "reading literacy" is mentioned in the curricular documents FEP PE only marginally, in the study plans for future primary school teachers, the term "reading literacy" appears in several disciplines. It is undoubtedly debatable to what extent the above disciplines will respond to reading literacy development in students. Judging by the content of the plans, their purpose is to provide future teachers with the competencies that support the development of reading literacy in primary school children following pre-literacy in pre-primary education. The disciplines are purely of a didactic focus because they appear in the third grade of study and higher grades after the students have completed relevant theoretical preparation. The disciplines include teaching methods, organisational forms, assessment criteria, and particularly didactic aspects that help develop reading literacy, such as modern critical thinking methods or specific didactic instruments. Looking at the courses and their objectives, undergraduate preparation of future teachers at the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc, in reading literacy is sufficient. Judging by the elaborated objectives of the courses, they develop the competencies of future teachers, especially professional competencies aimed at reading literacy.

The paper describes the differences between a beginning teacher and a future teacher including their roles and characteristics. The teacher's personality

is also presented. Focus is also on the teacher's professional journey and the competencies that every teacher should have. Last but not least, the paper emphasises the professional competencies crucial for developing reading literacy. The last part of the paper focuses on preparing future primary school teachers and briefly analyses the courses that develop future teachers' professional competencies in the context of reading literacy. In the current extraordinary situation, of course, the undergraduate training of future teachers has also changed, as this is also conditioned by distance learning. It is necessary to adhere to the content of the study plan. However, the content of teaching in the undergraduate preparation of students is changing so that students are equipped with competencies for distance education. Although it is assumed that graduates of the study programme Teacher training for primary schools will have the competencies mentioned above, their professional and teaching experience will be acquired later. We will monitor this fact longitudinally and deal with this issue through didactic tests with primary school pupils to obtain feedback and be able to relevantly answer whether the established study plans are adequate for the development of reading literacy. Although an experienced teacher supervises ongoing and continuous teaching practice during university study, only independent decision-making and student feedback help a beginning teacher use the competencies in practice. At the same time, an integral part of educational mastery is maintaining a positive class climate, which supports active work and motivates better performance and interest in learning.

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Przygotowanie licencjackie przyszlych nauczycieli w Republice Czeskiej w kontekście umiejętności czytania

Streszczenie

W artykule skupiono się na licencjackim przygotowaniu przyszłych nauczycieli w kontekście umiejętności czytania. Składa się on z części teoretycznej i części empirycznej. Część teoretyczna opisuje i definiuje podstawowe pojęcia ściśle związane z tematem, w tym przygotowanie licencjackie przyszłych nauczycieli, umiejętność czytania itp. Część empiryczna omawia analizę aktual-

nych programów studiów na Wydziale Pedagogicznym Uniwersytetu Palackiego w Ołomuńcu (Republika Czeska). Celem artykułu była analiza programów studiów i porównanie z wygasającymi, ukierunkowanymi na umiejętność czytania. Autorzy przeprowadzili jakościowe badanie badawcze, aby odpowiedzieć na pytanie, czy przygotowanie licencjackie przyszłych nauczycieli Uniwersytetu Palackiego w Ołomuńcu w kontekście umiejętności czytania jest wystarczające i czy plany studiów w programach edukacyjnych odzwierciedlają wymagania praktyki pedagogicznej. Do badań wykorzystano analizę dokumentów.

Analiza dokumentów wtórnych odnosi się do danych już zebranych (Donnellan, Lucas, 2013). Według Hendla (2005) celem analizy jakościowej jest nienumeryczna organizacja danych w celu ujawnienia tematów, prawdziwości, zależności i jakości. W tym kontekście termin nienumeryczny ma zastosowanie nie tylko do danych, ale także do ich przetwarzania. Ze wstępnych badań wynika, że stosunkowo dużej części przyszłych nauczycieli brakuje praktycznego szkolenia nauczycielskiego ukierunkowanego na dydaktykę przedmiotową, opierającą się również na umiejętności czytania. W związku z trwającą pandemią wirusa COVID-19 konieczne było dostosowanie metod i form pracy do rozwijania umiejętności czytania poprzez kształcenie na odległość. Autorzy artykułu uznali za istotne dokonanie analizy programów studiów w kontekście umiejętności czytania i udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy przygotowanie licencjackie przyszłych nauczycieli jest wystarczające oraz czy plany studiów programów kształcenia odzwierciedlają wymagania praktyki pedagogicznej w zakresie umiejętności czytania, korzystania z treści wymienionych powyżej, analizy dokumentów. Z wyników badań wynika, że plany studiów programów edukacyjnych odzwierciedlają wymagania praktyki edukacyjnej. Choć fakty opisano w artykule, autorzy uważają, że problematyce rozwoju umiejętności czytania poświęca się wystarczająco dużo uwagi, opierając się na analizie planów nauczania w nauczaniu dla I etapu szkoły podstawowej. Choć termin „umiejętność czytania” pojawia się w dokumentach programowych FEP PE jedynie marginalnie, w planach kształcenia przyszłych nauczycieli szkół podstawowych termin „umiejętność czytania” pojawia się w kilku dyscyplinach. Bez wątplenia dyskusyjne jest, w jakim stopniu powyższe dyscypliny wpłyną na rozwój umiejętności czytania wśród uczniów. Sądząc po treści planów, ich celem jest wyposażenie przyszłych nauczycieli w kompetencje wspierające rozwój umiejętności czytania u dzieci ze szkół podstawowych, po ukończeniu umiejętności czytania i pisanie w edukacji przedszkolnej. Dyscypliny te mają charakter czysto dydaktyczny, ponieważ pojawiają się w trzeciej klasie studiów i klasach wyższych, po ukończeniu przez studentów odpowiedniego przygotowania teoretycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: przygotowanie licencjackie; przyszły nauczyciel; umiejętność czytania; analiza; dydaktyka przedmiotowa; Republika Czeska.