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# THE ROLES AND COMPETENCIES OF A TEACHER IN AN INCLUSIVE CLASS

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## *Abstract*

In line with the principle of giving chances to all pupils, the school and the current class assume the integration of children with special educational needs. This aspect involves more competencies, roles and responsibilities for the teacher, both in terms of designing and conducting instructional and educational activities, developed in formal, non-formal and informal environments. The present study aims to approach the way in which these competencies necessary for the teacher can be practiced during teacher development programs with a specific theme. In order to do the investigation, we used the survey based on a questionnaire and the method of analysing the products of the activity. The tools applied were an opinion questionnaire and an analysis grid of the portfolios developed by the learners. The target group consisted of 92 trainees, teachers of various specializations, who covered and promoted the CESFORM continuous training program developed by the Department for Teacher Training, the University of Craiova, from 2017 to 2018. The questionnaire aimed at knowing the learners' opinion about the roles and competencies necessary for the teacher to carry out the activity with an inclusive class, which they practiced and developed within the training program. The same aspect was also pursued by analysing the portfolios developed by the students during the program, using an analysis grid. The results of our investigation highlighted the role of the training program in the exercise of these competencies.

**Keywords:** Competencies, roles, inclusive education, inclusive class, special educational needs.

## 1. Introduction

In accordance with the new educational paradigms, the competency is, at present, the way to concretize, to express finalities, both for the pupils, in the attempt to shape their training profile, as well as for the teachers, in the desire to achieve the proficiency profile imposed by the specifics of the performed activity.

With a cognitive-constructivist meaning, the term has undergone numerous attempts to define and operationalize.

Thus, for Gonzales and Wagenaar (2007), a competency is a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive capacities, the knowledge and the ability to understand them, interpersonal, intellectual and practical capacities, and also ethical values. Competency development is the goal of all training programs. (as cited in O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011)

For most of the authors who have approached the issue of educational competencies, as well as for the creators of the regulatory-type curriculum documents, the competency is a "mega result" (Manolescu, 2015), a set of elements describing the complexity and diversity of the acquisitions: knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes (Mogonea, 2010).

Closely related to the concepts of competency and standards, the one of outcomes is used, which has many implications, most of which refer to what the learner should know, understand and be able to demonstrate at the end of a sequence of learning (Gonzales and Wagenaar, 2007 as cited in O'Gorman & Drudy, 2011, p. 18).

Derived from the status, the roles of the teacher are his responsibilities, respected and practiced in the classroom, both in formal contexts (the most numerous) and in non-formal and sometimes informal contexts.

According to the elements of educational policy and the curriculum documents, the specialized literature records lists of competencies, roles of the teacher, adapted and nuanced, also in line with the many variables of training or educational situations.

For example, Joita (2007) describes and exemplifies the roles and competencies of the teacher in the constructivist class. Thus, according to the mentioned author, the main roles and categories of competency necessary for the teacher to constructively achieve the didactic activity are: • general, to ensure professional success; • involved in the training management inside the classroom; • of relation, involved in solving educational, ethical problems in the constructivist class; • involved in the reflection activity in the didactic-research action.

The Joita (2000) achieves a competency profile of the teacher only from a managerial perspective, starting from the idea that he is a manager of the class, responsible for managing the various educational resources and the many situations it involves: general competencies; in planning, designing, programming; in organizing the activity, the educational situations; in making decisions; in conducting, coordinating and guiding students; in coordinating actions; in the completion, evaluation and regulation of the educational actions.

Other authors (Ilie, 2011) approach the professional style formation of the teacher from the perspective of the new educations.

## 2. Problem Statement

The necessity of adapting the didactic act to each training situation, to the needs and possibilities of each student requires the practice and valorisation of many roles and competencies, especially for the classes in which children with special educational needs are integrated. The inclusive class implies different roles and competencies for working with these categories of children.

The concept of inclusion, regardless of its form of implementation (inclusive education, inclusive school, inclusive class) refers to "different things to different people", but he has different meanings in each educational system due to social, cultural, historical differences (Nketsia, 2016, p. 21).

Starting from the policies and principles promoted by UNESCO, according to which an inclusive education system can only be created if ordinary schools become more open, Graham and Scott (2016) present a common perspective on inclusive education, which involves creating an environment for the students with disabilities, so that they could succeed in having the same opportunities as their colleagues, but also a more recent perspective which extends the concept of inclusion to other categories of pupils who, for one reason or another, may be restricted in their access to education, no matter that the reason is disability or gender, behavior, poverty, culture or the refugee status.

The educational systems have developed different models of initial teacher training for the inclusive class, which involves the formation and development of competencies, based on content specific to each category of special requirements, on the principles to be respected (Jelas, 2010, Isosomppi, & Leivo, 2015).

Some authors (Movkebaieva, Oralkanova, & Uaidullakyzy, 2013) consider that for the inclusive class the teacher's competencies can be placed on three levels:

*Motivational* – it consists of the presence of motivation for the implementation of inclusive education in a series of values and personal orientations, features of the teacher (tolerance, lack of prejudice, emphasis on communication and interaction)

*Informational* - it refers to the theoretical knowledge about the psychological profile of the children with disabilities, the particularities of their personality development, the psychological and pedagogical principles that are the basis of their evolution; the technical knowledge of the forms, methods, instruments, the conditions for the effective implementation of inclusive education, of adapting the technologies to their specifics; the skills of designing the activities with the children with disabilities;

*Operational* – it takes into account the strategic competencies related to elaborating finalities, selecting and optimally integrating content, assessing the work done, designing and implementing the co-education process of children with special educational needs and of those with a normal development, communication, interaction and construction skills, of achieving a development environment in the inclusive class, optimizing the use of resources to stimulate the development of children with disabilities.

In many countries, the number of children with learning disabilities or those with learning difficulties included in general education classrooms is constantly increasing (Mogonea, 2010, 2014, Nel, Tlale, Engelbrecht, & Nel, 2016).

The European Union's policies support the issue of inclusion, highlighting the idea of training teachers for diversity, for an educational environment that meets the needs of all learners, promoting tolerance, respect for diversity, civic responsibility (Public Policy and Management Institute, 2017).

Accepting diversity as a natural fact is a prerequisite for achieving good inclusive practices (Soldevila Pérez, Llanos, & Guasp, 2017).

Some authors underline the need for initial training and continuous professional development from the perspective of inclusive education. They believe that inclusive education should be an integral part of the teacher training curriculum (Nandini, & HaseenTaj, 2014).

Sumana (2016) believes that in order to achieve successful inclusive education that has formative effects for all the students in the classroom, teachers should use the following strategies: use of computer and multimedia systems, team teaching and collaborative learning.

Mulaudzi ans Dube (2016), quoting McCray and McHatton (2011), believe that successful teaching and learning in a virtual class is based largely on the knowledge, abilities and disposition of the teacher (knowledge, skills and dispositions - KSD). Loreman, Sharma and Forlin ( 2013) believe that KSD means, in practical terms, the development of cognitive knowledge and of the theoretical base of the profession (head), the development of attitudes and ethical, moral beliefs reflected in the behaviour (heart) and the acquisition of the necessary technical and practical skills to fulfill the essential roles of the profession (hands) (cited in Mulaudzi & Dube, 2016).

Tyagi (2016) proposes a series of roles and responsibilities of the teacher in the inclusive class to identify and accept children with disabilities; developing a positive attitude towards both children with normal development and those with disabilities; placing children in class so that they feel comfortable, aspect that improves classroom interactions; organizing the educational space, removing, where possible, architectural barriers so that the children with disabilities have independence in movement; involving children with disabilities in almost all activities in the classroom; adapting the school curriculum so that the children with special needs to be able to learn according to their possibilities; providing educational support so that all the children with disabilities can learn; supporting and counselling parents and making the community aware through school activities; collaboration with medical staff, psychologists, social workers, parents and support teachers; adapting the assessment of special needs children; sending remedial instructions to the children who need it**.**

## 3. Research Questions

What is the learners' opinion about the competencies exercised during the *Teacher Training for Children with ESC* Program?

What is the level of development of the competencies specific to inclusive education?

What is the teachers' opinion on the changes they are going to make in their work with pupils?

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The final results of our investigation aimed at knowing the opinion of the teachers participating in the *Teacher Training for Children with ESC* Program about the role that this program has in the formation of competencies and in exercising certain roles claimed by the activity with the inclusive class.

*The research hypotheses,* consistent with its purpose, were as follows:

1. The teachers in the target group will develop their professional competencies to manage the inclusive class

2. The assessment portfolios of the learners will reflect the level of development of the didactic competencies required for the activity with the integrated children?

## 5. Research Methods

The research methods we used were the survey based on a questionnaire and the analysis of the activity products, respectively of the students' portfolios. For this, we applied a survey questionnaire and portfolio rating grid.

The questionnaire contained 16 items of different categories (with closed answers - most of the items - with open and semi-closed answers), which aimed to know the opinion of the subjects regarding the role of training programs in practising/ developing some competencies and roles necessary for the teacher in an inclusive class. The same issues have been pursued through the portfolio evaluation grid as summative assessment tools. The 15 items of the grid were aimed at assessing all the elements of a competency (knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes) applied to the field of inclusive education, as well as aspects related to the correct structuring of the portfolio. For each indicator, a score of 1to10 was given, their average proving the frequency of each.

The target group consisted of 92 teachers of various specializations, teaching both in urban and rural areas, predominantly in Dolj County, but also in Olt and Valcea.

## 6. Findings

The results of the opinion questionnaire applied to the teachers allowed us to know the level of development of the competencies specific to inclusive education. We selectively present the answers given by the interviewed subjects to some of the most significant questions for the problem under investigation.

The purpose of the program was to change the perception of the teachers and the community towards children/ pupils with SEN (special educational needs) and to empower teachers to build a curriculum adapted to the particularities of each child in order to achieve differentiated and personalized learning activities. 89,13% of the trainees appreciated that this goal was achieved.

One of the items of the questionnaire aimed at knowing the learners' opinion about the competencies exercised during the Program, competencies that are useful for the didactic activity carried out with the inclusive class. The students were given the opportunity to choose several answers. Following their responses, we have achieved a hierarchy of competencies considered to be the most important, presented in Table 01.

**Table 01.** The learners' opinion on the competencies exercised during the Program

| Crt. no. | Competencies exercised during the Program | No. of answers |
|---|---|---|
| a | An appropriate understanding of the specifics of SEN children's education, from the perspective of the psychological characteristics of the children's personality | 84 |
| b | A creative use of certain methods and techniques for identifying the special educational needs students | 80 |
| c | The development of the competencies to formulate solutions, hypotheses, conclusions for different educational situations provided by educational theory and practice | 58 |
| d | The manifestation of a reflexive, receptive, innovative attitude towards the design and implementation of an adapted curriculum and the optimization and quality assurance in education | 50 |

| e | The knowledge and creative use of methods and techniques for designing a curriculum adapted for the integrated education of pupils/ children with special needs | 54 |
|---|---|---|
| f | The elaboration and implementation of some personalized stimulation and intervention programs for the children with special educational needs | 64 |
| g | An appropriate understanding of the specifics and characteristics of the learning difficulties | 56 |
| h | The correct use of methods and tools to diagnose the learning difficulties | 52 |
| i | The creative use of methods and techniques of communication with the parents of the children with special educational needs | 46 |
| j | The development and implementation of some projects based on the school - families partnership of the children with special educational needs | 48 |

As there can be seen, the learners consider that the first two competencies were more practiced and developed during the Program, but to a great extent the other competencies were also stimulated, the differences being not very high.

To the question about the extent to which the students consider the thematic content of the Program to be useful for the activity with pupils with special educational needs, 72,82% chose "To a great extent", 11,95% - "I cannot appreciate". The rest of the responses (15,23%) were distributed to the other responses ("To a lesser extent" and "Not at all").

The opinion of the learners on the situations or contexts in which they used or can use the competencies formed during the Program is summarized in Table 02. For this item, too, the subjects had the possibility to choose several responses.

**Table 02.** The learners' opinion on the situations/ contexts in which they can use the competences exercised during the Program

| Crt.no. | Types of situations / contexts | Procentage |
|---|---|---|
| A | in didactic activities with the pupils with special educational needs | 92 |
| B | in other formal activities inside or outside the school | 62 |
| C | in non-formal activities organized with the pupils with special educational needs | 76 |
| D | in informal activities | 42 |
| E | in a different situation, namely ......................................... | 0 |
| F | In no situation | 0 |

As we can see, all the subjects chose the first option, the one about the usefulness of the competencies that the Program developed in formal situations, in the classroom. Instead, there were 0 responses for the last two variants.

Among the obstacles that can limit the application, in class, of the learning experience acquired during the Program, the teachers chose, first of all, variant b, related to the limited time resources, but also variant d, regarding the nature and degree of the child's deficiency, according to Figure 01.
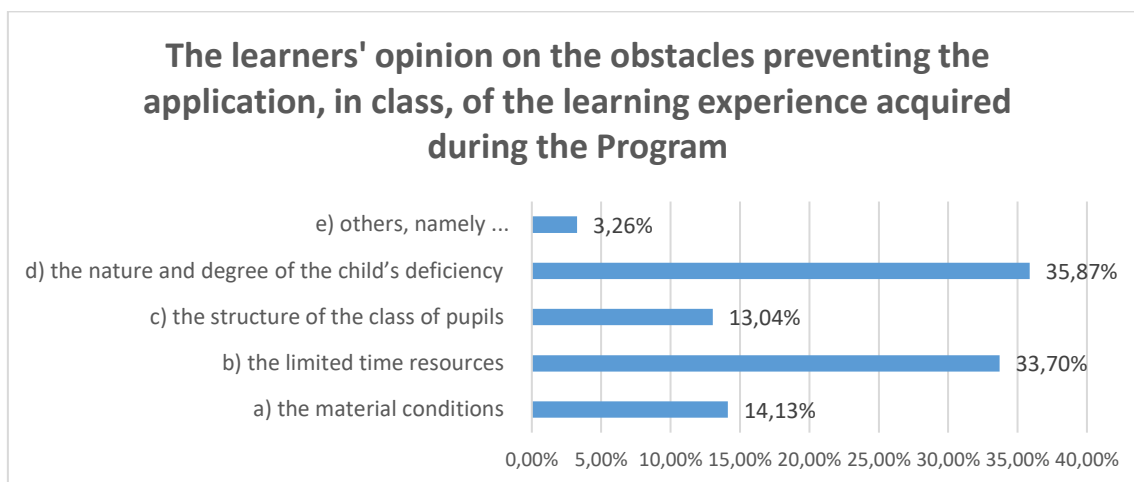
**Figure 01.** The learners' opinion on the obstacles preventing the application, in class, of the learning experience acquired during the Program

Some of the subjects also chose option e), which requires them to mention another obstacle than those specified in the previous variants. The subjects indicated the lack of a diagnosis of the child, determined by competent people, as a result of the parent's refusal.

Another item in the questionnaire investigated the opinion of the subjects on the changes they were going to make in their work with students with special educational needs.

The responses preferred by the learners are shown in Table 3.

**Table 03.** The teachers' opinion on the changes they are going to make in their work with pupils

|   | Types of changes | No. of responses |
|---|---|---|
| a | changes in the concept and attitude towards the education of the children with SEN | 62 |
| b | restructuring the design of the activities for a differentiated class | 42 |
| c | improving the ways to achieve personalized intervention in pupils with SEN | 78 |
| d | changes in the organization of the educational situations, in particular by applying the organizational arrangements and the new methods | 56 |
| e | optimizing the ways of intervening in the case of the children with learning difficulties | 64 |
| f | the improvement of the tools of knowing the SEN pupils' personality | 56 |
| g | improving communication with the children with SEN and their parents | 62 |
| h | optimizing collaboration with other colleagues, with parents | 48 |
| i | the nature and degree of the child's deficiency | 36 |

The trainees consider that the Program helped, first of all, to improve the ways of achieving personalized intervention in the education of children with special educational needs.

As for the grid for the evaluation of the students' portfolios presented at the graduation of the Program, it made it possible for us to know the extent to which this Program managed to develop certain competencies required by the activity with the inclusive class.

We present, in Table 4, the results obtained following the application of the portfolio evaluation grid.

**Table 04.** The results obtained following the application of the portfolio evaluation grid

| Crt. no. | Indicators | Frequency scale (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Very good | Good | Sufficient | Insufficient |
| 1. | Appropriate use of the specific inclusive education terminology | 68,48 | 31,52 | 0 | 0 |
| 2. | The knowledge of the specificity, etiology and symptomatology of the different categories of deficiencies | 61,95 | 25 | 13,05 | 0 |
| 3. | Observing the conditions of the curricular design specific to inclusion | 55.44 | 29.35 | 15.21 | 0 |
| 4. | The knowledge of the principles specific to inclusive education | 79.34 | 20.66 | 0 | 0 |
| 5. | The adaptation of theory to concrete cases | 66.32 | 25 | 9.78 | 0 |
| 6. | Providing conclusive, relevant examples | 56.53 | 30.43 | 13.04 | 0 |
| 7. | Exploiting the psycho-pedagogical theories to explain concrete cases or situations | 60.86 | 27.18 | 11.96 | 0 |
| 8. | The validity of the achieved intervention plan | 53.26 | 29.34 | 17.40 | 0 |
| 9. | The ability of critical analysis, differentiation, generalization | 55.44 | 26.08 | 17.39 | 1.09 |
| 10. | The possibility of argumentation, counter- argumentation | 46.74 | 30.44 | 20.65 | 2.17 |
| 11. | Observing the stages of presentation and analysis of a case | 70.65 | 23.91 | 4.35 | 1.09 |
| 12. | The ability to personalize the teaching process according to the type of deficiency | 51.09 | 28.26 | 19.56 | 1.09 |
| 13. | The originality of approaching the training situations specific to an inclusive class | 55.43 | 33.70 | 9.78 | 1.09 |
| 14. | The manifestation of a proactive attitude towards integrated children | 85.87 | 14.3 | 0 | 0 |
| 15. | The organization and proper structuring of the portfolio | 86.96 | 10.87 | 2.17 | 0 |

The second hypothesis of this research, by applying the rating scale, we were able to record the level of competency development. This hypothesis was also confirmed, having as proof the frequencies recorded for all the items for the first two ratings of the scale.

## 7. Conclusion

The research tools that were used allowed us to know the usefulness of the Training Program for the practice and development of the competencies needed by any teacher in an inclusive class.

The previously presented results of the opinion questionnaire applied to the learners led to the confirmation of the truth of the undertaken research first hypothesis, namely *The teachers in the target group will develop their professional competencies necessary for the management of the inclusive class.*

As the teachers said, they have developed especially those competencies that aim at the appropriate use of the terminology specific to inclusive education, as well as those on the creative use of certain methods and techniques for identifying children with special needs. The competencies necessary to adapt the curriculum to the needs and possibilities of each child, as well as those aimed at developing a personalized intervention plan, according to the type of deficiency, are very important for the inclusive class. From the learners' answers we can see that these competencies have been developed during the Program.

The teachers believe that these competencies will help them manage, first of all, various formal or non-formal educational or training situations. Along with the increasing quality of the didactic process, teachers have the opportunity to overcome different obstacles and setbacks, which the class of pupils, especially the inclusive class, raises. Although teachers have mentioned the main difficulties they are facing, still, they have also outlined the possibility of overcoming them.

The changes anticipated as a result of a continuous training program on inclusive education cover, in the learners' opinion, all the components of competency, from the cognitive ones (the nuancing of terminology) to the praxiological, applicative (design, critical analysis, transfer abilities ) or the one about value (attitudes). The program has stimulated not only the cognitive dimension, but also the metacognitive and noncognitive nature of personality.

It is a necessity to improve the didactic style, to develop the pedagogical competencies and the teacher's managerial didactics. Continuous training programs come with a curricular offer able to contribute to these goals. The integration of the children with deficiencies into a class with normally development children is one of the greatest challenges a teacher has to face. His preoccupation to personalize the teaching activity, to adapt it to the level and possibilities of each student is emphasized in the case of the children with deficiencies. A teacher working in an inclusive class has to prove additional competencies compared to those who teach in an ordinary class.

We consider that the usefulness of these continuous training programs is obvious, especially in exercising the abilities of articulating the curricular elements in a coherent approach, perfectly adapted to each training situation. Teachers especially need to practice models, techniques, tools for designing their activities, assessing them, managing all the specific situations. Beyond these, however, the creativity of the teacher must also be put forth.

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