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THE ASSESSMENT OF PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCES OF SOLFEGGIO TEACHERS

Kratki znanstveni prispevek / Short Scientific Article

Abstract

For the purpose of researching pedagogical competences, a semi-structured interview with solfeggio teachers, all of whom are employed in music schools in Croatia, was conducted. The research has shown that solfeggio teachers value their competences primarily through the professional dimension. They are predominantly focused on achieving the educational tasks of solfeggio classes, practicing intonation and rhythmic skills, and learning the music metalanguage. Although they are aware of the importance of pedagogical competences, they emphasize their secondary position in relation to professional competences.

The results of this research lead to the conclusion that a greater awareness of the importance of pedagogical aims in teaching solfeggio and of the pedagogical dimension of competences with teachers in music education is needed.

Keywords: solfeggio teachers, pedagogical competences, music schools, Croatia

Izvlaček

Ocenjevanje pedagoških kompetenc učiteljev solfeggia

Pedagoške kompetence učiteljev solfeggia, zaposlenih v glasbenih šolah na Hrvaškem, so bile preučevane z uporabo polstrukturiranega intervjuja. Raziskava je pokazala, da učitelji solfeggia kompetence vrednotijo predvsem skozi strokovno dimenzijo. Večinoma so osredinjeni na doseganje vzgojno-izobraževalnih ciljev pri pouku solfeggia, urjenja intonacije, ritmičnih veščin in učenja glasbenega metajezika. Čeprav se učitelji solfeggia zavedajo pomena pedagoških kompetenc, poudarjajo njihov drugoten položaj glede na strokovne kompetence.

Rezultati raziskave vodijo do zaključka, da je potrebno večje zavedanje pomena pedagoških ciljev pri pouku solfeggia in da so pedagoške dimenzije kompetenc učiteljev glasbene vzgoje potrebne.

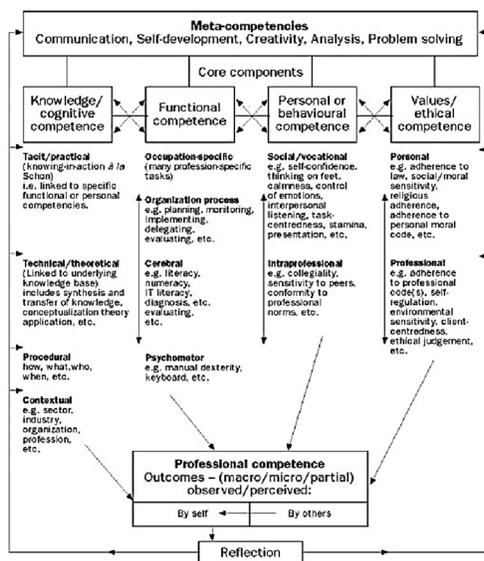
Ključne besede: učitelji solfeggia, pedagoške kompetence, glasbene šole, Hrvaška

Introduction

Music education in Croatia formally extends through the elementary and secondary music schools and the Academy of music (art). Music education differs from all the other art branches specifically because of the separate education system, established with the aim to educate professional musicians of various profiles (Nastavni plan i program za osnovnu glazbenu školu, 2006). Throughout the education, from the first and until the final year, solfeggio is distinguished as a subject for acquiring musical competences which may continuously be improved and perfected. Solfeggio is a fundamental theoretical musical subject within which intonation and rhythmic knowledge and skills are rooted and developed, enabling the understanding of the tone space in its time (rhythmic) and sound-space dimension (melody, harmony) (Rojko, 2012). Students acquire knowledge and develop skills they can then employ in the active use of music scripts for singing, writing and understanding music (Rojko, 2005; Ban & Svalina, 2013). The content of solfeggio as well as the teaching methods used in solfeggio classes are highly specialized and cannot be compared to any other musical-theoretical subject. The knowledge and skills acquired are of the individual nature and are not manual and *tangible*, as are those used in playing an instrument; rather they refer to specialized mental combinatorial skills expressed during *prima vista* singing and writing music dictates (Radica, 2015).

Due to the importance and complexity of this subject, in order to achieve quality and productive teaching, the competences of the teacher are of the crucial importance, as he is the expert with the range of abilities needed to successfully fulfill complex requirements and tasks of solfeggio classes. The term competences has been accepted and used in education practice for the past fifteen years, and numerous authors interpret it in various ways (Madsen & Cassidy, 2005; Hrvatić & Piršl, 2007; Ljubetić & Kostović Vranješ, 2008; Lončarić & Pejić Papak, 2009; Vizek Vidović, 2009). This concept, from the pedagogical perspective, most often highlights the teacher's competences (Anić, 2003; Jurčić, 2012), which refer to a combination of teacher's knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, personal characteristics and experiences (Pastuović, 1999; Hrvatić & Bartulović, 2007; Matijević, 2011). Teacher competences can be seen through the professional, pedagogical, organizational and communicative-reflective areas (Brust Nemet & Velki, 2016). The contemporary approach to competences emphasizes the need for multidisciplinary observation for the purpose of constructing a "holistic model of professional competences". In this regard, Cheetham & Chivers (1996) demonstrated a model with four core components of professional competences: functional competence, personal or behavioral competence, knowledge/cognitive and values/ethical competence. "Knowledge/cognitive competence" has been defined by the authors as: ... the possession of appropriate work-related knowledge and the ability to put this into effective use. "Functional competence" is defined as: ...the ability to perform a range of work-based tasks effectively to produce specific outcomes. "Personal or behavioral competence" is: ...the ability to adopt appropriate, observable behaviors in work-related situations. "Values/ethical competence" is defined as: ...the possession of appropriate personal and professional values and the ability to make sound judgments based upon these in work-related situations. Each of the given competences is structured of elements which in more detail define aspects of performance (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Dimensions of teacher meta-competencies, elements of the holistic model of professional competence (adapted from: Cheetham & Chivers, 1996, p. 24)



Although European pedagogical experiences recurrently emphasize the need for a multidisciplinary approach to teacher competences, the situation in Croatia has been quite different until recently. The competences have been studied solely from the aspect of knowledge of a particular subject (Sekulić-Majurec, 2007), ignoring the pedagogical-psychological dimension. By analyzing the curricula of music teaching studies in Croatia, it is clear that, even though significant progress has been made in recent years, the multidisciplinary acquisition of competences has not been fully accomplished yet. Professional (vocation) content encompasses a significantly larger amount of lessons than the pedagogical courses. Students, future solfeggio teachers, have a relatively limited number of courses covering general and specific knowledge, abilities and skills in pedagogy, general and music psychology, didactics and methodology, giving them pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodical content which contribute to the acquisition of a wide-range competence model. Apart from a limited pedagogical content, it is also common for teachers of general pedagogy to teach some pedagogy subjects at the academies, when in reality they are not familiar with the specifics of music education. For all these reasons, the teachers who have just completed their studies start their teaching practice under great influence of the teaching they themselves experienced as students in the music schools (Novak, 2016). The author emphasizes that teachers have highly developed professional competences related to the professional knowledge gained during the studies, but at the same time they are not equipped with competences enabling them to successfully employ and apply acquired professional knowledge, solve practical problems and plan, organize and evaluate teaching objectives.

Kostović-Vranješ & Ljubić (2008) conclude that pedagogically competent teachers are expected to reflect their professional knowledge, skills and abilities and personality traits,

such as emotional sensitivity, creativity, co-operation, ethics, etc., as a positive model to their students. Numerous authors emphasize the extraordinary role of personality by specifying numerous desirable traits of a successful teacher (Antić, 2000; Açıkgöz, 2005). Brophy (1993) writes that a successful music instructor shows a high level of musicality, plans his teaching in order to achieve clearly stated music goals, successfully recognizes student's problems and needs, successfully communicates and motivates learners, uses appropriate and effective educational materials, develops a stimulating working environment, considers and plans an effective personal growth and development program, recognizes his weaknesses and seeks to successfully overcome them and serves as a model for his students (Brophy, 1993). Jurčić (2014) observes contemporary teachers through a dynamic combination of dynamic competences and pedagogical competencies that relate to personal, communication, analytical (reflexive), social, emotional, developmental dimensions and skills in problem solving. Jurčić (2014) as well as Terhart (2001) and Palekčić (2007) emphasizes that the teacher's competence in pedagogical communication is directly related to the success of the teaching process. Developed communication competences are positively reflected in the establishment of partnerships with students; they support student's learning and have a significant impact on the creation of a democratic and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Communication competencies are closely linked to social skills and emotional competences through which teachers overcome specific situations they encounter during the educational process. Such competences enable successful leadership of humanist-oriented teaching, fostered by tolerance, encouragement, and directed towards the development of individual abilities.

Reflexive competence refers to the analysis of progress of the individual lesson. Rojko (2009) highlights the need for permanent intelligent observation, research and reflection of music education for the purpose of progress, while Ljubetić & Kostović Vranješ (2008) conclude that only a teacher who permanently invests in the improvement of his/her professional performance can meet the vision and challenges of the teaching profession. The core guideline of all teachers is precisely the developmental competence, the desire to improve knowledge and develop and perfect skills as well as the pursuit of lifelong learning ideas in reaching the best possible educational and learning outcomes.

Research

Aim and research methodology

This paper describes the research carried out to determine the pedagogical competences of solfeggio teachers. In accordance with the formulated goal, the following tasks were identified:

- Analyze opinions on the desirable competence profile of solfeggio teachers.
- Analyze the problems teachers encounter in teaching solfeggio.
- Examine attitudes about the particular dimensions of pedagogical competences; personal, communicative, analytical, social, emotional and developmental.
- Identify competences which are not sufficiently developed during the studies and fit them into the guidelines for a more successful curriculum on art studies.

In the research analyzing the pedagogical dimensions of teaching competences, thirteen participants were included, ten teachers and three solfeggio teachers. All teachers are highly qualified university graduates who completed art academies in Croatia. The range of years of employment is from 1 to 25 years.

A semi-structured, individually conducted interview was used to collect the necessary data. Main and follow-up questions were prepared and the answers were recorded for further processing. The research was conducted during February and March 2019. Participation in the research was voluntary and confidential with the intention of using the answers solely for scientific purposes.

Results and Discussion

In qualitative data analysis, the coding procedure was used to obtain interpretable categories, which were then interpreted in accordance with the research tasks. In the data analysis, data reduction was used by “cut and paste” method – cutting and pasting similar statements together (Krueger, 1994). Some comments were quoted entirely because of the contextual significance of the whole statement.

It should be noted that all the interviewees commented openly on all the chosen topics and thus provided insight into the real state of solfeggio teaching.

Interview with teachers began by expressing opinions on the desirable competences of solfeggio teachers. Qualitative data processing has shown that teachers consider professional competence indispensable, but that many other didactic-methodological and pedagogical competences are needed as well.

A professor who has completed the theoretical course, but if this is not possible, professional factors must be satisfied and [He/She] must have a clear professional aim of the lesson.

The profession (vocation) must be in the first place and most importantly to have the broad understanding, to realize that solfeggio is not for its own purpose but has the function in real-life situations.

Ideal solfeggio teacher should be familiar with the subject's contents, including professional competences, a lot of work needs to be done in methodological and pedagogical approach.

It would be good for him to have completed the theoretical course, and flexibility as well, creativity, willingness to adapt to new technologies are needed.

The teacher must first be an expert, needs to know the subject matter, be competent in performing all aspects of teaching. He should set an example for students, possessing professional competences and be persistent in the implementation of teaching contents.

Must know how to convey knowledge in different ways, adapt to different situations with students, have emotional qualities, and possess professional knowledge.

Evidently, to be a professional music theorist, possess good psychological and pedagogical competences and be a good “manager”, with developed organizational and social skills.

Must be consistent, systematic, but above all he must be a full personality. He must have a good vision on the aspects of solfeggio teaching.

They should be able to motivate students to work and progress, with quality professional and pedagogical competencies, of course

First of all, you need to be an expert in your field, and be patient, resourceful, straightforward and clear.

After a brief discussion on the desirable competence profile of a solfeggio teacher, teachers were asked about the problems they encounter in teaching solfeggio. *General inertia of younger generation* is the most common problem mentioned in responses, while other reasons include *overloaded curriculum, lack of concentration in students, and insufficient engagement of students due to numerous over-burdening school obligations*. Teachers also mentioned the difficulties they had at the beginning of their work experience, which included *administration and keeping daily log of class activities and lessons, selection of effective teaching methods, and great differences in music abilities of students*.

In answering a question concerning the self-assessment of teaching competences in solfeggio teaching, teachers solely emphasized the professional aspect of personal competences. They highlight that they are *very successful in teaching solfeggio*, and as an indicator of their success, they state that *they fully achieve the curriculum objectives and goals, and emphasize the large number of their students successfully passing the entrance exam at the academy*. Two teachers along with the high self-assessment of their proficiency competencies emphasize that there is *room for improvement* and they are *open to development and improvement*.

I suppose I am satisfied, but I generally have a high level of self-criticism. I believe that I am improving and developing my teaching competences, but I am aware that I still need a lot of work on my abilities.

Following the teachers' responses to the previous question, in which they expressed their focus on the professional dimension of teaching, they were asked about their vision of the objectives of solfeggio classes. Responses were closely related to the professional aspect of the classes. We highlight several responses, which confirm the orientation of teachers towards the educational curriculum.

Lead the way to learning the music metalanguage. Exercise intonation skills and theoretical knowledge.

To be able to sing the written music and write down the music we hear.

Writing, intonation, and managing in the sound space.

I'm mostly guided by the professional objective, the solfeggio content and my goal is to teach students music literacy.

The primary goal would be to master dictation.

Ensure the correlation of teaching the instrument and solfeggio.

We followed up those answers with an additional question: “Do you teach solfeggio in the same way you were taught?” Most teachers answered they teach in a similar way. More experienced teachers emphasized they are aware of *the need to change the way they work and enrich the content*, but nevertheless *they choose safe, already proven methods*.

The next question concerned students’ participation in planning and achieving the objectives of the classes. Teachers, in most cases, report they only *occasionally allow students to choose music pieces or activities during classes*, but do *not allow them to deviate from the professional objective*:

I do not allow a lot of deviations, because I plan the lesson!

Students do not participate in content planning, but I respect their proposals for choices, for example, of the kind of dictation they will write and the like.

Students can’t persuade me to do anything beyond the teaching content, but if I notice they haven’t mastered something, I will change the course of the lesson to achieve the best results and master the content.

I’m just not that prone to it. They can only participate in planning the lessons if they haven’t mastered something and we need to take a step back to that part of the content.

I do not allow students to plan the lesson, because we, the teachers, are those who organize a lesson. I appreciate the suggestions if there is time and the proposal is in line with the lesson.

Sometimes I let them choose an activity during the lesson, but not when new material is being processed.

There are times when I let them choose, but I never deviate from a professional objective.

Sometimes they have the freedom to choose music samples during the lesson, but we don’t deviate from the professional objectives.

In research question: *Do you believe that you have acquired sufficient competences and practices for challenges of the solfeggio teacher profession?* the teachers discussed the acquisition of professional and pedagogic competences at the academy and the experiences they encountered after the employment as teachers of theoretical music subjects. In their responses, teachers emphasize the problems that arise in seeking employment due to the low number of hours of pedagogical practice in music schools during the studies and point out the ability to overcome those obstacles by attending additional training programs.

As far as the Academy is concerned, I think it was good introduction to professional knowledge, but we lacked practice lessons at music schools. As for my work, I have learned the most in the “attempt-error” manner. I regularly attend

professional training programs, but everything depends on the content being offered, lecturers, etc.

At the end of the faculty I got the fundamental knowledge for teaching, but I reached the necessary experience through practice.

The competences I have gained during my studies are mostly professional, and at the professional conferences I have been upgrading my pedagogical, psychological and didactic skills. I often hear useful advice from people with a lot of experience.

As far as the profession itself is concerned, I did not have to develop my skills additionally after graduation because there was no need. As far as methodology of teaching is concerned - I had to learn constantly and I still have to.

I was prepared at the faculty for teaching music and art classes, but not for teaching solfeggio, so I had to learn it myself.

The faculty has built the foundation, the main idea for practice, but when one begins to work, he starts seeing his/her gaps in the knowledge and works towards correcting them.

At the university I have acquired a minimum of pedagogical knowledge and this was not satisfactory at the beginning of my work experience. I have to constantly develop and improve my skills.

Most of my competences have been defined through teaching.

The next question related to the self-assessment of the style of teaching because the teacher's pedagogical competences are dynamically combined with their didactic competences. Some teachers mentioned the atmosphere in the classroom, highlighting the importance of pleasant emotional atmosphere. Additionally, all teachers emphasize the need to focus on educational outcomes, not mentioning the raising component.

In the teaching, one has to achieve a good balance between the autocratic and democratic style of teaching, as this greatly influences the teaching process and students. I always aim primarily for the realization of a professional objective.

It is most important to reach a professional objective, but I try not to create an uncomfortable atmosphere. I respect the students' abilities and I don't think it is right for them to be afraid of me.

It is important to establish discipline during the processing of new content, but when we practice, then the atmosphere is more relaxed. I think my style is more autocratic, but not in a particularly strict way.

In responses related to the communication dimension, teachers evaluate their communication skills as *satisfactory, clear and open*. They emphasize the importance of humor, and even *renaming dictations using witty names* helps to establish better communication. *Student's ignorance and their occasional attempts to shift attention from the subject at hand* are mentioned by teachers as causing problems in communication. They declare:

I talk a lot with the students, but this does not exclude reaching the professional objective.

Sometimes I do a gag, I'm joking at the beginning of the lesson and the atmosphere is more positive, which creates better surroundings for the processing of the solfeggio content.

Numerous authors directly link teacher traits (Shoyer & Leshem, 2016), emotional “rules” (Winograd, 2003) and the quality of classroom interaction (Dorman et al., 2006) and the effectiveness of the teaching process. The personal dimension of pedagogical competences was the topic of our next question. Teachers assessed themselves *emotionally competent* by emphasizing *empathy, understanding of their students, adherence and appreciation* as the most important characteristics. They particularly emphasize *that the students exploit the excessive empathy of the teacher and kindness in order to avoid their obligations* and conclude that *it is necessary to observe the students and try to behave fairly and professionally in every situation.*

The answers to the question related to the assessment of their social competences and problem solving skills, lead to a conclusion that it is obvious that some of the teachers feel they are *very professional in dealing with such situations.* They stress they *are listening to both sides of the story, and if they cannot solve a conflict, they refer the case to the school principal.* The rest of the teachers *feel very bad in such situations and try to solve the problem as soon as possible, in peaceful manner.* Some teachers are aware they *sometimes overreact, but they never exaggerate.* Teachers feel they are establishing good relationships with parents and cooperate well with their colleagues and are *generally open to cooperation.* In responses to other aspects of social competences, teachers highlight they are *approachable and they deal with mastering the problems of intonation and rhythm with students.*

Pedagogical competence implies a quality analytical dimension (Jurčić, 2012). Qualitative data processing gave rise to two categories and one subcategory of responses. The first category related to pedagogical documentation, which demonstrates that only a small part of interviewed teachers write the lesson plan for each individual lesson and personal notes, which serve as a reflective diary. In this category, statements which made it clear that the purpose of the teacher’s personal notes is assessment and evaluation of the students were particularly emphasized. The above mentioned categories also outlined the statements which referred to the evaluation of students in solfeggio classes. Teachers mention that students are numerically evaluated each month in the following aspects: music theory, rhythmic dictation, melodic dictation, melodic-rhythmic dictation, a vista singing, musical intervals, chords and class participation.

The second category concerned analytical reflections of the teaching process. We quote the following answers:

I always try to write down specific situations so that they can be solved properly. I always try to accompany every lesson by some notes.

I always think of good and bad decisions. I am very self-critical in this respect and I am always trying to improve.

I reflect, I try to assess how much I have achieved of the outcomes, analyze the results of dictation, I reflect in what aspect I have progressed during the previous lesson, what could be improved, briefly - I summarize the total course of the lesson.

I always think about and write down the outcomes and other situations in order to know what needs to be changed and improved.

Although teachers declare that they are systematically conducting self-assessment, none of the teachers emphasized the specific method of self-monitoring and self-evaluation, such critical friendship or evaluation questionnaires in which students express their overall satisfaction with classes, parts of the teaching process, atmosphere, etc.

Jurčić (2012) states that a competent teacher analytically addresses his or her teaching. He does not remain at one level of acquired knowledge, skills, values, and achieved motivation, but he also critically looks beyond his professional, pedagogical and didactic efficiency and overall success in the education process.

Conclusion

Solfeggio is a subject fully realized on the principles of an open curriculum model. Teachers, on the basis of their competences, select the activities and the manner of content implementation, aimed at the development of musical knowledge and students' abilities and understanding of fundamental music parameters. In addition to building musical knowledge and abilities, the teacher's competence is reflected in numerous pedagogical dimensions related to motivating students, nurturing their values system, forming opinions and attitudes, creativity, developing self-esteem, and ultimately in the overall development of young musicians.

From the results of the research it is obvious that the solfeggio teachers perceive their competences primarily through the professional dimension, and after that through the aspects of pedagogical competences. Dominant orientation towards professional competences is evident in all teacher responses. When determining the purpose of the lessons, teachers are oriented towards education tasks aimed at teaching intonation skills and learning the music metalanguage. There is obvious orientation towards the traditional methods, based on teaching methods used by teachers' solfeggio teachers during the academies. The elements of the traditional curriculum are visible in the insufficient involvement of the students in planning and implementing solfeggio classes. In their responses teachers reveal their unwillingness to succumb to the idea of collaborative relationship between students and teachers in planning the specific activities. They also emphasize the need to establish discipline in the classroom, so the students could focus better on the given tasks.

When evaluating their teaching competences, teachers emphasize professional competences as the most important. They conclude that after completing their studies, they felt professionally competent for the challenges that await every solfeggio teacher, but the small number of pedagogical practice led to insecurity in terms of their pedagogical and didactic competences. They mention they continuously improve and

develop pedagogical, psychological, didactic and methodical competences during their long-time work experience and through professional training programs.

Given the opinion of the teachers, we identified the need for greater awareness of the importance of educational goals in teaching solfeggio and emphasizing the pedagogical dimension of competences of teachers in music education. In order to understand the multidimensional view of teachers' competences, in line with contemporary pedagogical perspectives, we are also stressing the need for the implementation of a large number of didactic and pedagogical content in study programs and the increased number of hours of pedagogical practice, so that students, future teachers, could through systematic learning of different teaching skills gain self-confidence for successful teaching job.

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Povzetek

Na Hrvaskem je glasbeno-izobraževalni sistem usmerjen v izobraževanje in usposabljanje profesionalnih glasbenikov. Študenti imajo od začetka študija na glasbeni akademiji do njegovega zaključka poleg pouka inštrumenta, ki ga želijo popolnoma obvladovati, tudi pouk solfeggia. Pomemben dejavnik uspešnega pouka solfeggia je kompetenten učitelj, strokovnjak, ki lahko svoje strokovno znanje in spretnosti kombinira z učinkovitim pedagoškim delom. Učiteljeve pedagoške kompetence se kažejo v različnih dimenzijah in se neposredno zrcalijo v kasnejši pedagoški praksi. Izražajo se skozi razredno klimo, zadovoljstvo učencev s poukom solfeggia in njihovo motivacijo za nadaljnje glasbeno izobraževanje.

Raziskovali smo pedagoške kompetence učiteljev solfeggia, zaposlenih v glasbenih šolah na Hrvaskem. Kot raziskovalni inštrument je bil uporabljen polstrukturiran intervju. Raziskava je pokazala, da učitelji solfeggia kompetence zaznavajo in najvišje vrednotijo predvsem na strokovnem področju: v povezavi z doseganjem vzgojno-izobraževalnih ciljev pouka solfeggia, urjenja intonacije, ritma in učenja glasbenega metajezika. Pomena pedagoških kompetenc se sicer zavedajo, vendar jih v primerjavi s strokovnimi kompetencami razvrščajo na drugo mesto. Raziskovalni rezultati kažejo, da je učitelje solfeggia potrebno v večji meri ozaveščati o vlogi in pomenu pedagoških kompetenc za uspešno izvajanje pouka.