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# METHODOLOGICAL PRACTISE AND DEVELOPMNET OF COMPETENCE OF FUTURE TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** Initial education of future teachers is the first step in the continuous process of education for the noblest profession, to be a teacher. Composed part from this chain is the methodological practice of students. During the methodological practice, future teachers acquire skills, qualifications and competences necessary for professional delivery of quality, independent teachers work. As model of learning, methodological practice enables the close relation of theoretic knowledges from different teaching subjects with “real - life” process of education that allows the interdisciplinary relation and preparation for the future profession. Direct participation in educational process allows student – future teacher to plan, organize and realize the teaching process; to create, implement different strategies for educational work, but meantime initiate the need for continuous and permanent improvement and innovation. These arouse the need of continuous learning and improvement; to follow the innovation, but also to take independent initiatives for implementation of new findings in personal practice aimed to accomplish quality educational process.

Methodological qualification of future teachers is conditioned by achieved intermutually communication and cooperation between institutions for high education (teaching faculties) and other educational institutions (schools and kindergartens).

Methodological practice, her aim and importance, manners and effects from her implementation are the subject of this study. The paper presents the theoretical knowledge regarded study subject, results from applied research that used the method of theoretic analyses and descriptive – explicative method. Content analyses of study programs for initial education of teachers and interview for the students at study programs for pre – school and primary school education were applied as study techniques. The obtain results indicate the need of certain changes and advancements of students methodological practice in a sense of: increase of number of hours for methodological practice, more frequent and intensive cooperation between teaching faculties and educational institutions; continuous changes and innovations of the program for methodological practice according new educational trends, findings, standards for learning, development and education.

**Key words:** students, education, qualifications, institutions, interdisciplinary

## INTRODUCTION

Achieving quality, efficient and effective system of education is the intention of every country that wants to keep steps with modern trends and move forward. The realization of this intention is impossible without one of the key actors in the educational process, the teacher (preschool, primary school teacher).

The teacher, its education, professional development and improvement are constantly under specific reform processes. Initial education of the teacher is the first chain in its professionalization with key goal: preparation for selected profession but in the same time preparation to start the process of lifelong improvement. It's a process that requires continuous and long-lasting changes in the individual – the teacher. The final aim of this process is preparation for quality education for our children.

Reforms in the initial teacher education as one segment of professional development are implemented in order to overcome the weaknesses such as: insufficient connection of education with modern social trends; fragmentation in teaching; the fragmentation of the subject areas, and so called over-academisation, i.e. too many theoretical knowledge on the expense of the practical, competencies of the teacher, etc.

Parallel with the perceived weaknesses that teacher's profession is faced with and in accordance with contemporary scientific trends and social developments, the amount of knowledge that young generations should adopt assisted by teachers is constantly increasing which in turn, makes the process of learning and teaching more complicated. This process becomes even more complicated having in mind the time that we live in: use of modern technology, technological knowledge and changes that indicates in learning environment. This also implicate setting of new requirements, new tasks, new roles, and new values to the teacher profession.

In fact, the problem of teacher competence is categorized as one of the main problem in the educational system. Solution for this is expected to contribute to higher quality of education.

### ***Competence, competencies of teachers***

The assumption is that each teacher wants to be one who will possess the epithet good, the best teacher. The achievement of this virtue is impossible without the possession of the key pedagogical competences.

Competences are understand as a mosaic of diverse, broad and flexible set of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes that teacher should acquire during the process of their initial education. In fact, they are only consider as a base, the first basic layer, that further during the process of work, is redesigned, mastered, upgraded and developed with accordance with the requirements of the practice and according the context in which they will be applied.

In the contemporary educational process, the teacher is faced with numerous roles, i.e. organizer, leader, pointer, motivator, coordinator, reflexive practitioner, team co-worker. All these roles require particular competences. At the same time, the teacher must have capabilities to follow and adopt all new trends and findings in the profession and science, changes in society; to engage maximum in planning, realization of educational goals, tasks, motivation.., continuously to upgrade personal competences, to research, to innovate and improve personal teaching practice, to invest in personal professional development etc.

So, from the huge range of competencies, what are the one that needs to be acquired during the initial education? What are the key competences that the teacher should have on the threshold during the teaching career? Considering the amount of competences, when defining the key competences that should be adopted by the teacher during initial education, we used the national and international documents as frames and starting points. Following are some of those documents: "Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications" (European Commission,2005), "Improving the Quality of Teacher Education" (Commission of the European Communities,2007), "Tuning educational structures in Europe: Summary of Outcomes – Education" (2005) , "Teacher Education in Europe: An ETUCE Policy Paper" (European Trade Union Committee For Education, 2008), "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning — A European Reference Framework" (The European Parliament and the Council of The European Union, 2006). "The European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning" (European Commission: Education and Culture, 2008), 'Dublin' descriptors for Short Cycle, First Cycle, Second Cycle and Third Cycle Awards" (Joint Quality Initiative Informal Group, 2004).

Numerous national documents based on the European Common Principles on Teacher Competences and Qualifications for teacher competences in other countries as well as principles that are used as foundation in education in RNM, were also considered. Based on this, a Catalog of key competences of teachers in RN Macedonia (2013) was prepared.

In the above mention catalog, as key for professional engagement of teachers highlights the following competencies:

- Professional knowledge of the particular field teaching, subject matter and teaching methods;
- Teaching and learning;
- Creating a stimulating learning environment;
- Social and educational inclusion;
- Communication and cooperation with the family;
- Professional development and professional cooperation (Catalog of key competences of teachers, 2013: 3).

Faculties are the basis of education, but also the basis for professional maturation. The theoretical and practical teaching that take place at faculties for education that educate future teachers in RSM lead to the development of a range of competences.

Through theoretical instruction, students receive answers to the question "How it should be?", while in practical classes they acquire real knowledge and experience, based on theoretical knowledge, of the experience gained in and through various dynamic and variable pedagogical situations.

The key issue is the relation between theoretical contents and practice. They should provide not only functional knowledge but also reflective skills of future teachers. The idea of achieving a balance between

theory and practice in past few years lead to changes in existing curricula in order to increase the percentage of practical teaching for students - future teachers. This was exactly, what was happening by designing, redesigning the existing curricula at the teaching faculties

***How does the process of realization of the practical instruction of the students at the Teacher's faculties in the RNM was ongoing?***

The main goal of the practical teaching is to enable students to apply the theoretical knowledge and awareness of the profession of teacher through personal experience, through life in the educational institutions, participating at the educational process / teaching process. In the realization of practical teaching there are several stages:

- An initial stage in which students are introduced and informed about the environment in which the teaching process is carried out;
- A second phase or a phase of direct participation which implies participation of students in the realization of a part of the practical teaching. The goal is to gradually involve the student in the educational process, and
- The third phase - involves the self-realization of the planned activities by the students;

In the study programs at the teaching faculties in the RNM (Skopje, Stip, Bitola, Tetovo) the practical teaching is differently named: clinical practice, pedagogical practice, integrated methodology practice, methodical practice. In some of the study programs of these faculties, it is realized as a separate teaching subject, called pedagogical practice (Faculty of educational sciences - Stip, Pedagogical faculty - Skopje) or incorporated within all subject programs.

The pedagogical practice is realized in the preschool institutions/ primary schools, based on the previously established agreement between higher education institution and educational institutions, regulated by the appropriate guidelines. In the preschool institutions/ primary schools the students realize a series of activities related to acquaintance of the preschool institutions/ primary schools as a subsystem of the local environment, their organizational setup and internal connections, the interaction that exists in these institutions; the existing climate and culture; the management structure and the professional services, the pedagogical records and documentation, the forms of cooperation between the school / kindergarten and the family.

The student is obliged during this practice to conduct his / her own diary of work in which he will make a detailed overview of all the activities that will be followed in the preschool institutions/ primary schools, on the basis of the previously given instructions from the subject professor, and prepares them in cooperation with the mentor in the preschool institutions/ primary schools, as well as in cooperation with colleagues. For these activities, students discuss during the common meetings with the mentors in the preschool institutions/ primary schools. Here, students receive suggestions, ideas and directions how to achieve higher efficiency and positive practice in realization of educational process.

Pedagogical practice allows to students to realize the first contact with direct pedagogical reality, with their future vocation, through direct participation in the educational process. Immediate realization of tasks from different educational areas / subjects, through activities in which they plan, organize, implement activities in order to achieve the set goals, is ensured through methodical practice.

The ability of the students for quality, self-supporting work in the teaching is provided through methodology practice. In our country, as in many European countries, the process of methodology practice is designed in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Declaration, as well as in line with the modern trends in these countries for working with children of preschool and elementary school age.

It leads to the acquisition of competencies for quality realization of the teaching work. It takes place through the direct participation phase, primarily the student has the role of an observer and a direct participant to later, acquiring appropriate experience, to have the role of an independent performer, implementer, and participant in the performance of the educational / teaching process. At this stage, the student in collaboration and through the mentor teacher and mentor professor performs a range of activities: observation, monitoring, and active participation.

***What does the methodological practice of students, future teachers (educators, teachers) allow?***

- Acquiring knowledge about the specifics and laws in the process of development and formation of concepts from different areas;
- Based on the acquired theoretical knowledge and practical activities, competences for independent and creative work (without routine, templates, clichés) in all educational areas / subjects;
- Training for independent preparation and realization of practical work / teaching, based on modern knowledge about children's development and modern methodological requirements;
- Have the opportunity to see the social climate in the group / class;
- Possibility for implementation of different forms of communication and interaction with children / students in the group / class;
- Empower themselves to create a learning environment that will encourage and lead to holistic development;
- Abilities for correlating and integrating content from different educational areas / events subjects;
- Training to apply diverse, modern learning and teaching strategies that will enable easier introduction of children around the world;
- Training to monitor and evaluate the achievements of children / students; .
- Qualifications for quality and reasoned evaluation of their own work and achievements as well as the practical work of their colleagues.

By realizing methodical practice, the future teacher tries to answer a range of developmental questions - What ?, How ?, Why ?, works organized, rationally, strives to achieve more, explore, project, diagnose, forecast, actively participate in the field of one's own professional development and professional development. The methodological practice cannot be successfully realized without established cooperation between faculties, children's institutions, primary schools.

The realization of the methodological practice started after performed hospitations, i.e, in the phase of direct student participation. The mentor professor is the one who will evaluate, after the simulated exercises at the faculty, after the mentored hours, whether the student is ready for direct contact with the children / students, contact with the mentor teacher, prepared for realization of the set goals from the specific area, a subject.

Immediate contact with children / students is based on before preparation for a particular teaching unit / activity, its detailed analysis (placement of goals, tasks, planned methods, forms, techniques, strategies, visual means, microarticulation of the hour / activity, teacher, child / pupil), detailed instructions and directions for the planned activity / hour.

The questions about the involvement of the methodology in the study programs at the faculties for educating teachers, the way for her practicing, her strengths and weaknesses, the obstacles encountered in her implementation, the key actors in her: mentor teacher, student and mentor professor, their roles in her implementation, as well as a series of other issues to this day capture the attention of the expert and scientific public.

***METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK***

Some of the explanation and answer for the previously elaborated aspects and issues related to methodical practice, we tried to find in the results of the realized empirical research. The subject of our interest were study programs of the Faculties for education of teacher staff for preschool and primary education, in terms of: the representation of study subjects that foresee the implementation of methodological practice, percentage representation in relation to the total number of subjects at these faculties, naming of study subjects, the evident differences that exist between the different faculties in relation to the hours foreseen for independent realization by the students.

The technique of interviewing, more specifically, the free interview, was applied for examining the opinions and attitudes of students from the Faculty of Education Sciences in Stip. We use it to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological practice, the challenges they face during its realization, as well as students suggestions and recommendations for improvement of the methodical practice.



The ultimate goal of the research was not just to make a review and assessment of the quality of methodological practice, but on the contrary, to search for answers and directions for work, to asking new questions, whose answers will lead to its advancement.

The improvement of methodology practice is not a goal by itself, but it is a means that leads us towards the achievement of a higher sublime goal, quality methodical practice, quality teachers, quality education.

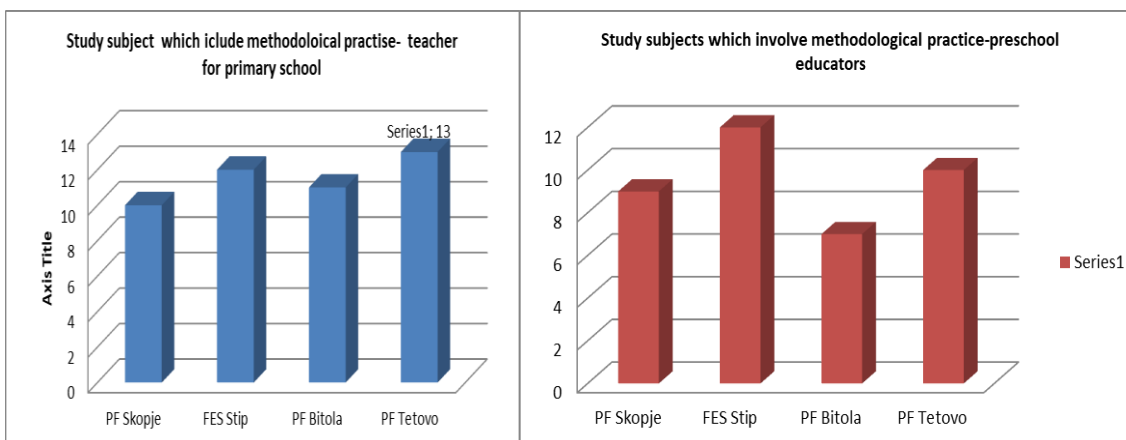
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The education of teachers in RSM is realized at several faculties which function within the frame of the state universities, ie. in Skopje Bitola, Stip, Tetovo. The study programs are designed according to the contemporary trends in the development of higher education, in accordance with international, national legal regulations for the education of teachers. The initial education according to these programs lasts 4 years, during which students acquire 240 ECTS. The analysis of the study programs at the indicated faculties was aimed at determining the representation of individual subjects which imply the implementation of methodical practice for a specific subject / area in accordance with the ones stipulated in the curricula, the programs for operation in the primary schools/preschool institutions.

The Graphics 1,2 and 3 present the data related to the ratio of the number of methodical subjects to the individual faculties for education of teaching staff.

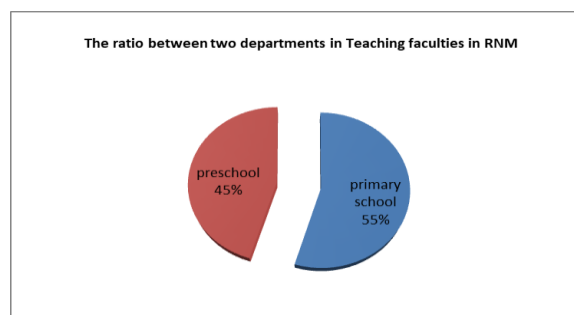
The analysis of the study programs showed different percentage representation of subjects that incorporate the methodical practice of different departments. The largest representation of methodical subjects in the study programs is at the Faculty of educational sciences, in Stip ie. 30% of the total number of courses and both departments are subjects that imply the implementation of the methodology practice. The ratio of the other faculties is as follows: PF Tetovo 24% of the department of class teaching, ie 20% of the preschool education department; PF Bitola 21%, department departmental classes, ie. 15.2% in pre-school education; PF Skopje, 21% compared to 25% in the pre-school education department. This situation, as well as the presented histograms, speaks about the need for networking of the faculties of teachers, redesign of the programs and approximately equalization of the number of these subjects for facilitation of the transfer of students from faculty to the faculty in RSM.

Regarding the number of hours of methodical practice (under the mentorship of a teacher or independent performance) we have a equal situation on all Faculties, ie the number of exercises everywhere is 2 hours per week from a separate teaching method.



Graphic 1: Subject with methodological practice- primary school teachers

Graphic 2: Subject with methodological practice- primary kindergarten teachers



Graphic 3: Ratio of the departments at teaching faculties

During the analysis of the programs, we noticed a different naming of subjects that incorporate methodical practice in themselves. Namely, at the Pedagogical Faculty in Tetovo, have study courses named as for example Didactic of the teaching on a specific subject (art) with pedagogical practice, while on other Faculties are referred to as the Teaching Methods for Art Education 1, 2 ie. Basics of art education with methodology. This set us in front of the question, which can be further subject to some subsequent research: the incompatibility of pedagogical terminology, an issue that needs to be regulated in ours, as well as in the wider European areas, for easier recognition, compatibility of study programs.

The technique interviewing, was used to examine students' attitudes, future teachers for the implementation of methodological practice. Totally, 12 future students were interviewed, i.e. 6 departmental teachers, 6 future preschool educators, students from third and fourth year. The sample was intentional. The interviewing took place in a warm and pleasant atmosphere for duration of 15-20 minutes based on pre-determined terms. The note of data took place after the conversation.

The discussion took place on several topics related to students' knowledge about identification of methodological practice, beginning and duration of the same, their expectations from the same, the cooperation with mentors teachers and mentors professors, their readiness for independent performance of the teacher's profession, the obstacles they encountered as well as their suggestions for her promoting.

As for the identification of the term methodical practice, 75% of students pointed out that the same applies to pedagogical practice from separate methods, while 25% of them pointed out that methodological practice means clinical practice. Such difference can be attributed to the degree of students' experience regarding methodology practice. Namely, the interviewed students are students of the third year who are actually at the start ie. gradually entering the field of methodology.

The methodical practice starts in the third year, the fifth semester, according to the study program, and for the same, as all students pointed out, are trained through hospitalizations, monitoring of mentoring lessons / activities realized by a teacher mentor (teacher / educator) in the educational institution (kindergarten, primary school). Guidelines for realization of the same, received from professors mentors and teachers from the preschool institution/primary schools. Workshops prepared by mentor's professors are also of great help.

Following are some of the students' opinions:

A. M: The Practicums help me in carrying out methodological practice. I think that such practicums should have all the subjects named Methodics and they must contain clear and concise directions, but also to contain more examples of practical activities, as a guide, direction, idea for our creative approach to preparation for independent realization of the class.

MA: Practicums are necessary for successful implementation of methodology practice. We use the examples from them most often during the first hours, for the simulation of specific activities. It would be good to take part when creating them, to present personal experiences, to point out the obstacles in the realization of the activities, that can be met and how students can easily overcome them.

Regarding the issue of guidelines for realization of methodical practice, interviewed students pointed out that Instructions they receive from mentors teachers and mentors professors. Students believe that they

need more support and help to realize the teaching hours / activities. They highlighted the following expectations from the *mentor teacher*:

- Greater cooperation, acceptance by the mentor teacher;
- Closer, concise guidelines for performance of the teaching hours / activity;
- Getting to know the working climate that exists in the teaching class/group ;
- Guidelines for creating a learning environment, interior styling;
- Possibilities for use of modern technology;
- Professionalism, better communication, interaction between them, the mentor teacher and mentor professor.

Following are the expectations of students from the *mentor professor*:

- Support, understanding;
- Reference to other sources of knowledge for a particular teaching unit;
- Professionalism, better communication, interaction between them, the mentor teacher and mentor professor
- Attention, patience, clear guidance;
- Assistance in realization, involvement during the activity.

Regarding the question of preparedness of the students to realize methodical practice, we had a situation of division, ie, 50% of the students, referred to students from the fourth year who expressed whole readiness to implement the methodology practice, in contrast to students of the third year who consider that they are partially prepared for it.

The reasons for such answers are understandable, having in mind that students from the fourth year already have more experience on the field, ie the possibility of participating in a number of pedagogical situations, realization of methodical practice from all study subjects as well as involvement in the realization of the pedagogical internship.

Students pointed out several suggestions and recommendations for the implementation of methodical practice. Following are some of them:

- Earlier start with methodical practice, ie. monitoring mentoring lessons from different subjects from the first year, in more than one preschool institution/primary school, in order to perceive different experiences;
- Volunteering at the preschool institution/primary school during the winter holiday;
- Identification of a mentor from a preschool institution/primary school responsible for one student or for a small group of students who will gradually lead them in advancement;
- Strengthening the cooperation with mentors-teacher, professor, student;
- Implementation of methodology practice in combined departments;
- Higher duration of pedagogical internship, instead of 3 weeks, duration of 30 days.

## **CONCLUSION**

The theoretical explication and the analyses of the results of the conducted micro research lead us to the following conclusions:

- Continuous innovation of the subject programs at the teaching faculties in the function of development, strengthening the competences of future teachers;
- Intensifying the cooperation of high-educational institutions, the institutions for education of children / students;
- Networking of the faculties for teachers, preschools institution, primary schools in RNM, sharing experiences;
- Strengthening the effectiveness and efficiency of work with students-future teachers;
- Continuously informing students about their progress;

- Inclusion of students in activities / trainings that will involve exchange, critical thinking, their training for applying new strategies for learning and teaching;
- Continuously encouraging and supporting students in the performance of various types of activities both at the Faculty and at the preschools institution/primary schools;
- Increasing the number of hours for methodical practice and practical work in the frame of the standard programs as well as longer duration of attendance at the educational institutions, during the studies;
- Strengthening the student's "sense" about the role and significance of methodology practice;
- Specifying and regulating the role of a mentor teacher.

And finally,

"Experience is the best teacher -*Usus est optimus magister*"  
Ciceron

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