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## The Profile Of The Teaching Profession - Empirical Reflections On The Development Of The Competences Of University Teachers

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### Abstract

In this article we have proposed to present a theoretical and practical approach to the teaching profession, based on analysis competencies, which should hold them a good university teacher in a globalized and competitive world. The results of the study were obtained by applying a written questionnaire to subjects who work in different universities from Romania and Spain. The study included a total of 485 people from four universities in Spain and four universities in Romania. The results obtained by analyzing the responses of the subjects included in our sample have showed that both groups of teachers – from Romania an Spain – have the same opinions regarding the competencies which should hold them a good university teacher but were registered significant mean differences regarding transversal competencies dimension ( $p=0,002$ ,  $p< 0,05$ ). We believe that the professional perfection and development are the sources of a professional continuum, which makes educational career rolling laws and is subject to management resources, mobility needs, and flexibility of the teaching staff.

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### 1. Introduction

The topic on teaching profession is so generic that it has turned out to be almost oceanic. Currently, the issue of on the development of the competences of university is researched very often. A teacher is a highly valued personality in a society and teaching is considered to be the most sacred and distinctive profession.

### 2. Theoretical approaches

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### 2.1. The teaching profession

In the conditions of contemporary society the teaching profession becomes one of the professions with the highest degree of mobility. As indicated by Potolea (2008), the *teaching profession* is continually rebuilt and becomes a scientifically controlled process through the study of factors that determine it. The teaching profession requires the continuous training and development of the teacher, so that he/she can offer to the one who is taught a comprehensive vision on the field that he/she teaches (Potolea, 2008). In order to define the teaching profession one must first of all remove some prejudices in this area. Cl. Gautier and his associates (in Păun et al., 2008) mention some of these biases, according to which for one to be a teacher one only has to know the subject to be taught, to have talent, intuition, culture and some experience. *But what distinguishes the teaching profession from other professions?* By studying the literature we find that the teaching profession, compared to other areas, has some peculiarities: the method of recruitment of teachers, the experience in the field and career development with a clearly defined advancement. The professional educational environment provides multiple security opportunities based on empathic services, hygienic conditions of work and psychological comfort, which attracts the specificity of emphasis of the teaching profession itself. The problems faced by teachers in Romania in recent years (Potolea & Ciolan, 2003, p. 293) are related to the social status of the profession, to the low level of remuneration, to the lack of motivation for a teaching career etc. Also, we need to note the continuous development of the teaching profession generated by the new demands of the society. It is necessary to emphasize that the human resource makes a difference due to its degree of education and training - in achieving any strategic and political objectives. The construction of the training programs should be provided with a diagnostic task centered on the definition of the professional profile at the workplace, in order to facilitate the appropriate information required for the identification of the formative needs. In this respect, the development of the professional profile serves as a support for defining the needs and expectations designed to contribute to the improvement of the development of professional activity through the development of an information system which allows for the planning of future intervention actions.

*The teaching profession* requires a prior initial training, not only in terms of the formation of specialized professional and psycho-pedagogical competencies but also in relation to the awareness of particular responsibilities involved by youth training, while vocational guidance has to come in line with one's own professional development needs, with a set of skills designed properly for the teaching profession.

### 2.2. Toward a professional profile of the teaching profession - characteristics of a good university teacher

It is likely that in many occasions, each of us have asked ourselves: *Is a good teacher born or does one become a good teacher? It is possible to learn how to be a good teacher? Is the teacher a simple transmitter of knowledge? What characteristics define a good teacher? How is a teacher formed? What skills should a good professional master?* There are no recipes to be a good teacher. Through his/her undertakings, he/she plans and organizes creative acts based on which students explore, experience, discover, know themselves, develop and achieve their aspiration based on a larger self. Over time, numerous studies have been developed on the attempt to determine the characteristics which define a good teacher. Next, we shall mention a few of them.

Among the qualities of a good teacher we shall mention empathy, tact and pedagogical skills, the ability to teach in a creative and interactive way. Based on the research undertaken, Pânișoară (2009, 2010) presents a series of principles of practical pedagogy including the principle of empathy, which brings into question the imperative of the cognition of students. Sometimes, not the things the teacher says are important, but the way in which he/she says those things. Teaching a course by means of a monologue does not incite students' motivation, since they consider themselves ignored in this one direction communication. The way in which a teacher communicates with his/her students is important, and if he/she uses attractive ways to display information through interaction, the results will be immediate (Duță, 2010, p. 19). Ramsden (1992) highlights the main characteristics that university professors must possess: they have a wide repertoire of teaching skills, they never forget that their purpose is students' learning, they listen and learn from students, constantly assessing his/her teaching work, they think that teaching enables learning, they teach with enthusiasm, they show concern and respect for students, they are easily understood by students, they turn students into independent "learners", they use methods that make students learn actively and cooperatively, they provide quality feedback to students on the worked performed, they teach the key concepts of the subject and avoid overloading. González et al. (2010) conducted a study at the University of Seville to identify the most popular features of teachers according to students. In a hierarchical order, the main qualities identified were: student-centred methodology (87,6%); positive psychosocial and emotional climate (45%); teacher's

motivation/interest in teaching and subject (19,3%); mastering the subject (14,2%). The characteristics of a good university teacher imply social skills used in order to enter the inner world of the group of students, empathic abilities etc. Most educators agree that it is reasonable to expect teachers to be able to reflect on action (retrospective reflection) and reflect for action (prospective reflection)(...) Unfortunately, as Conway (2001) affirms, prospective reflection is not always present in teacher education programs, which for the most part tend to emphasize reflection on action (past oriented) and reflection in action (present oriented), even though the argument can be made that these types of reflection are less relevant to teachers with little teaching experience (Urzúaa & Vásquezb, 2008). Other three teachers characteristics discussed include nonverbal communication, teacher self-efficacy, and servant leadership (Steele Natalie, 2010). Axelrod (2008) notes that characteristics of effective teaching: (1) accessibility and approachability; (2) fairness; (3) open-mindedness; (4) mastery and delivery; (5) enthusiasm; (6) humour; (7) knowledge and inspiration imparted (Delaney et al., 2010).

Based on the literature and reviewing various studies about the profile university teaching staff, the qualities expressed by the research participants were grouped into eight dimensions, with the following meaning:

1. *Scientific competence* – to have specialized scientific knowledge;
2. *Teaching competence* – to know how to teach, to perform effectively the didactic functions and responsibilities;
3. *Transversal competencies* - those acquisitions that transcend the field, the study program having a transdisciplinary nature (teamwork skills, language abilities, IT skills etc.);
4. *Relational competences* - dialog with students, tutoring activities;
5. *Vocation and dedication* - motivation for teaching; interest in the teaching profession and in the stimulation of students' learning;
6. *Experience in educational institutions* - to have knowledge about the reality of educational institutions and of the teaching profession;
7. *Self-assessment and Professional Development* - self-critical capacity to improve the activity through continuous training;
8. *Research* - the power to conduct research both in relation to education and in relation to one's own subject, in order to improve teaching.

The question of professional qualities of teachers is actually answered by enumerating measurable competences. However, there are important qualities, which are not measurable, such as experience, reflection (judgment) and independence (Koch, 2008). Competence belongs to a family of concepts that rapidly enforces itself within a field necessitating a profound analysis. By "competence" (Zaharia et al., 2008) is named the capacity to select, combine and use adequately, as an integrated and dynamic unit, the knowledge, skills (cognitive, actionably, relational) and other attainments (values and attitudes), in order to solve successfully, effectively and efficiently, a certain category of problem situations, in various contexts (Potolea et al., 2010). This definition can be expressed by the following formula: **Competence = (capacities + knowledge + other resources) + situations**. A competence is defined in its three dimensions: the cognitive dimension- knowledge; the functional-actionable dimension – skills; the attitudes-values dimension, which is related to the individual autonomy and responsibility in exerting the professional competences. The diversity of classifications demonstrates that the issue of the teacher's characteristics is current. The degree to which these characteristic are held by each teacher and exercised in the conduct of the activities with their students are criteria used in assessing performance and indicators in their annual evaluation. A teacher can be ranked as "good" by means of the way he/she leads, guides the auditorium, by means of the way in which he/she manages to get involved in the teaching situation, to facilitate communication with students so that they get good exam results. The assessment of what a good teacher means is often different, each person builds a picture of the teacher based on theories of education, moral or social values etc.

### 3. Research methodology

The research conducted falls within the educational realm, opting for an integrated strategy, which correlates quantitative research with the qualitative one. The research took place in the November 2008 – July 2009, in four higher education institutions from Spain, institutions rated as representative for the country. Additionally, for the purpose of conducting a comparative study we resumed the investigation in our country, as well, between September 2009 and July 2010, comprising a series of four Romanian higher education institutions. The focus group comprised university academics taking part in the questionnaire-based survey, amounting to a total of 240 persons from 4

Spanish universities (*University of Barcelona; Polytechnic University of Catalunya; Polytechnic University of Madrid; Polytechnic University of Valencia*), and, on the other hand, 245 subjects from 4 Romanian universities (*University of Bucharest; University of Pitești; Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj and Transylvania University of Brașov*), chosen at random. The selection variables of university academics were: the country of origin (Romania, Spain); the higher education institution he or she teaches at; the faculty he or she belongs to; the gender (male/female); length of service in higher education (1 to 5 years, 5 to 10 years, 10 to 15 years, 15 to 20 years, more than 20 years); the professional category (assistant professor, lecturer, reader, professor, associate professor, consultant). The questionnaire in its final version was elaborated starting from the results of the pilot study, comprising 14 items. The data gathering procedure was the implementation of the questionnaire, in writing. In the process of analysing and interpreting the data obtained, we used the SPSS 17.0 statistical software.

**4. Results research**

In order to outline a possible profile of the university teaching profession open, response item 14 was elaborated. We conducted a rank hierarchy and it was showed that **in the opinion of the Romanian subjects** the following characteristics are important: *transversal competencies* (rank I, 25,3%); *teaching competencies* (rank II, 16,3%); *scientific competencies* (rank III, 15,5%). In comparison, the **subjects in Spain** placed in top three: *teaching competencies* (rank I, 17,9%), *scientific competencies* (rank II, 16,3%), and *transversal competencies* (rank III, 14,2%) (Figure 1).

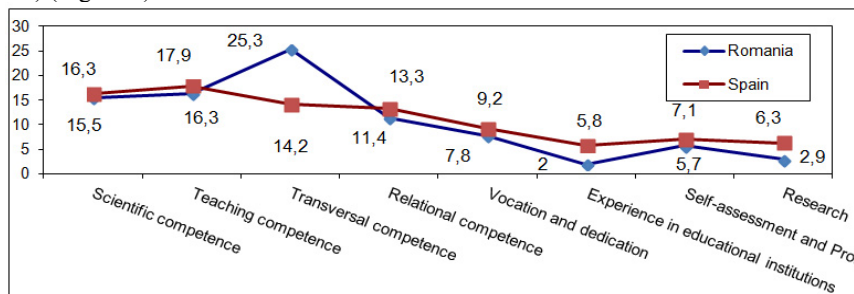


Figure 1. Distribution of responses on the characteristic of a good university teacher

The most important feature of a good university teacher in the opinion of the Romanian subjects refers to *transversal competencies* (eg. capacity of information use: analysis and synthesis, interdisciplinary linking of knowledge, solving the problems arising in the teaching room, team work, critical thinking), while subjects in Spain ranked *teaching competencies* first (eg. know how to teach, have a solid pedagogical training, psycho-pedagogical skills, good communicator, interactive teaching). We can see that the options regarding the features that a good teacher should have are similar in the opinion of respondents in both countries, as they occupy the first three top choices. In Table 1 we centralized the t-test results for samples of subjects in the two countries.

Table 1. T-test results characteristics of a good university teacher

Characteristics of a good university teacher	t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of			
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Difference	Error the Difference	Lower	Upper
1. Scientific competence	,222	482,244	,824	,00740	,03326		-,05796	,07276
2. Teaching competence	,464	481,406	,643	,01590	,03428		-,05146	,08326
3. Transversal competencies	3,109	464,984	<b>,002</b>	,11139	,03583		,18179	,04100
4. Relational competences	,636	479,391	,525	,01905	,02997		-,03985	,07794
5. Vocation and dedication	,557	478,553	,578	,01412	,02533		-,03565	,06389
6. Experience in educational institutions	-2,148	391,091	<b>,032</b>	-,03793	,01766		-,00321	,07264
7. Self-assessment and Professional Development	,615	476,105	,539	,01369	,02228		-,03008	,05746
8. Research	1,791	423,031	,074	,03393	,01894		-,00331	,07117

Analyzing the data presented in the table above we can see that there is a significant average difference between subjects in the two countries regarding the dimension of *transversal competencies* ( $p = 0.002$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) difference in

favour of subjects coming from Romania. This shows that subjects in Romania consider to a greater extent that a good teacher must possess transversal competencies as compared to the subjects in Spain. Another significant average difference, statistically speaking ( $p < 0,05$ ), is recorded in terms of the dimension *experience with educational institutions*, where  $t = 2,148$ ,  $p = 0,032$ , in the sense that subjects in Spain attach greater importance to this dimension as compared to the subjects in Romania. We find that the other dimensions that make up the competencies profile of a good university teacher (Table 1),  $t$  is statistically insignificant ( $p > 0,05$ ), a fact which shows that there are no significant average differences between the two samples of subjects (Romania-Spain). These attributes include their understanding of pedagogy and its impact on students' learning, their technical abilities to organise and manage learning, their motivation to improve their practice and the *ability to engage in individual reflection* (Shulman & Shulman, 2004, in Sutherland, 2010).

By comparing the averages obtained by the subjects in Romania and Spain, we find that there are average differences and similarities between subjects, a fact that confirms the *research supposition* (there are similarities and differences in terms of the vision, concepts, beliefs and practices regarding university teacher training in Romania and Spain). The differences recorded may be consequences of a high aspiration level of university teachers, in the sense that the awareness of differences between the perception of competencies relevance, their actual development and the one claimed by the European requirements indicates the desire of progress, of development to a high, superior level. Therefore, the need to develop professional skills and competencies can be understood by means of the poor training in this regard during bachelor's studies, as they afterwards focus on theoretical training rather than on training graduates as future practitioners.

## 5. Conclusions

The results obtained may constitute reflection points and valuable premises for the management staff within higher education institutions in view of addressing the training and development needs by means of building programs designed to innovate in the field of educational activity and lead to the increase of the education quality level and the students' preparation level. We believe that the professional perfection and development are the sources of a professional continuum, which makes educational career rolling laws and is subject to management resources, mobility needs, and flexibility of the teaching staff.

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