Competence Development for Cohabitation in the Primary Education Degree: the Students’ Voice

Mirian Martínez-Juárez\textsuperscript{a*}, Pilar Martínez-Clares\textsuperscript{a}, Cristina González-Lorente\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} University of Murcia. Department of Research Methods and Diagnostic in Education, Murcia Spain

Abstract

Learning centers, in their role as socializing agents, among their priorities include the empowerment of interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution competences to boost cohabitation inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, the development of certain competences in order to renew and improve them in the community scene proves to be essential in the education of those professionals that will actively be part of learning centers. In this paper we intend to discover and compare the development, command, and relevance of the primary education degree competences related to school cohabitation through the student’s point of view in their final academic year.

Keywords: Cohabitation, Socialization, Primary Education, Competences, Teaching Personnel.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, building a cohabiting environment in learning centers has become not only a challenge for the school system due to the rise in violence within the classroom, but also one of the most pressing concerns for the school community (López, Domínguez, & Álvarez, 2010). School cohabitation is being damaged and replaced by an increase in social conflicts (Uruñuela, 2006). This situation complicates the teacher’s task, which could be improved by an appropriate classroom and center environment; all of which will require the use of different dynamics in order to boost a real new order within the centers (Vaello, 2008). Quoting Grupo SI(e)TE Educación

* Corresponding author: Mirian Martínez Juárez.

E-mail address: mmartinez@um.es
own words (2010, p.14), it is all about understanding the learning center not only as “an organization for cohabitating in which common life takes place under a democratic point of view”, but also as a “cohabiting school in which involvement and discussion are the keys to learn to cohabit”. This way, learning centers must be thought as cohabiting areas as well as the places in which the necessary learning for it takes place. However, for this learning to be possible, cohabitating must be understood as much more than just the idea of “living together” since it is not the same (Grupo SI(e)TE Educación, 2010). According to Calvo Gómez-Rodulfo (2000) and Soriano Ayala (2007), cohabiting is sharing and respecting a physical place as well as experiences, feelings, relationships, etc. Therefore, different measures must be put in action in order to make cohabiting possible. Moreover, for these efforts to result in a good classroom and center environment, positive resolution of conflicts, participation, communication, collaboration, mediation need to exist.

Many authors agree in pointing out that, in order to effectively cohabitate, several factors must be addressed. For instance, Calvo Gómez-Rodulfo (2000) suggests taking into account affection, participation and personal encounters, while Grupo SI(e)TE Educación (2010) proposes to educate feelings within the school context leading the students to develop sympathy, affection, care, and attention towards themselves and others, as well as seeking the learning of emotional and social basic competences. Far from dealing only with these individual factors, López, Rodríguez and Álvarez (2010) also point out the need to act over certain family issues, such as lack of communication, and rivalry. On the other hand, Sánchez and Cerezo (2011) highlight the importance of improving social-affection within the group, which should result in a better understanding among its members. A trustful network and a better cohesion within the group might be encouraged for the communication of feelings, ideas and opinions within the group in order to develop a trusting environment and to work in conflict solving competences. All these factors can be resumed in the five keys that Beltrán, Sánchez and Poveda (2002) established for the development of school cohabitation: reward delay, sympathy, attachment relationships, identity building and classroom emotional control.

Dealing with these five factors will require the sharing cooperation and responsibility from family, schools, government and civil society (Touriñán, 2004). However, inside the learning centers teachers play a very relevant role. That is why it is so vital for them at the early stages of their education to acquire social and personal competences, and training about all the factors affecting their personal and professional performance. This is so, due to the fact that a teacher is not only a knowledge transmitter but also an attitude and value example, including cohabitation. This lead us to wonder whether future teachers have been properly educated for cohabiting in this new diverse, and conflictive school context (López, Domínguez, & Álvarez, 2010; Sánchez & Cerezo, 2011; Carpio & Tejero, 2012). At every learning or evolutionary stage, attention must be paid to the promotion of this development towards the cohabitation of cultures within the centers (Díaz-Aguado, 2006)

In this paper our goal is to discover and compare the development, command and relevance of the competences related to cohabiting, from the primary school degree through the point of view of this degree’s final year at the University of Murcia.

2. Methodology

2.1. Methodological aproach and design

This research uses a quantitative methodological approach since the primary school degree competences are considered measurable. The chosen research design will be non-experimental, due to the fact that there is not an intended manipulation of the parameters, nor random election of the participants according to their belonging to a particular group, cross-curricular, because the data collection was performed in a particular moment, and descriptive, since the objective is to discover the students’ opinion.
2.2. Participants

This research involved the participation of 158 students from their final academic year at the University of Murcia degree of primary education. From that total, 98.7% are female and 1.3% male. Their ages vary from 20 to 42 years old, having an average age of 22.9.

2.3. Instrument

The instrument used in this research for the gathering of information consists of an ad hoc created questionnaire named Questionnaire for the Evaluation of Degree Competences (CECGRA, according to its initials in Spanish) which aims to collect the students’ voices related to the development and command of the competences from the primary school degree as well as the relevance they grant to these competences. This document contains three parts:

- Participants’ personal: age and gender.
- Competences from the primary school degree, divided in four groups: basic, cross-curricular, general and specific competences. Each category is rated according to three aspects -for this purpose a Likert-type rate with five grades is used [1= Nothing; 2= A little; 3= Regular; 4= Pretty much; 5= A lot]-:
  - development (its impact through the degree subjects),
  - command (personal acquisition of it) and
  - relevance (importance granted for the professional future).
- Open (3) and half-open questions (2) that deepen into the students’ opinions related to the learnt knowledge and professional future.

In order to clarify these competences, in table 1 there is a list of this degree general competences.

| CGT1 | Discovering the theory, practical and psycho-educational basis of school subjects and the learning system |
| CGT2 | Discovering the management, organization and planning of the learning centers and classrooms and the skills assigned to them |
| CGT3 | Discovering and using the center management issues (group and collaborative work) |
| CGT4 | Acquisition of interpersonal skills that smoothen relationships within the school community |
| CGT5 | Knowledge management: identification, election and analysis of information |
| CGT6 | Integration of research and innovation as an improvement asset |
| CGT7 | Professional ethics biding in the school scene |

In table 2 there is a list of these degree specific competences.

| CET1 | Discovering the goals, curricular content and evaluation criteria in primary education |
| CET2 | Promotion children learning from a global point of view |
| CET3 | Design and control learning processes in diversity contexts |
| CET4(a) | Systematic observation of learning contexts and analysis of them |
| CET4(b) | Promotion of the inside and outside the classroom cohabitation |
| CET5 | Promotion of the autonomy, singularity and moral solidarity of each student |
| CET6 | Learning about children language, identification of possible malfunctions and observation of its evolution |
| CET7 | Learning of strategies to promote a fun environment where children comprehension, expression and interaction between languages are present |
From these figures, we can determine that CGT4, CET4(b) and CET15 are the competences which would help the teacher to promote a good environment inside and outside the classroom, as well as to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships that encourage cohabiting and allow conflict resolution within the school community, once they would be acquired.

2.4. Procedure

This paper is part of a wider research taken place in the Education Department at the University of Murcia which aims to know the students’ opinion, regarding the acquisition and development of their degree competences and the relevance they grant to them, for their professional future. The chosen procedure was as follows:

Firstly, a deep bibliography research was set in motion in order to establish the theme of the study and to transform into goals the questions that from the outset puzzled the researchers. Afterwards, the gathering information instrument was created by the research team. To grant full recognition to this instrument, it was tested and the collected information was analyzed by an expert panel. Then, the information gathering was planned. It took place during class hours, voluntarily and anonymously, through the first semester of the academic year 2012/1023. The obtained date were analyzed by the statistical package SPSS v19.

3. Results

Following these lines, you will find the results of each one of the research goals. Firstly, we aim to know the grade of development, command and relevance of the primary school degree competences more related to the school cohabitation from the students’ point of view. For this purpose, the average answer of the students for the general and specific competences of their degree is determined. In figure 1 we can observe that the development of one of the general competences directly related to cohabitation, CGT4, is one which have been less dealt with through the degree subjects with an average of 3.13. On the opposite, as far as the competence command is concerned, it is the third most acquired competence (=3.63). We also determine that the importance granted by the students to the CGT4 competence is the second best graded with an average result of 4.32, which probes that students consider it quite important.
In figure 2 we can appreciate the average answer of the students to the development, command and relevance of the specific competences of their degree. We want to remind at this point that the directly related to school cohabitating competences are CET4(b) and CET15.

Competence CET4(b) shows average results for both development (=3.27) and relevance (=4.46). This means that the answers provided by the students do not place this competence as one of the most or least relevant according to the studied aspects. However, it is one of the best commanded by the students, in third place, with an average result of 3.85.

As far as CET15 is concerned, this competence shows minimal levels of development (=2.46) and command (=2.90), which leads the students to believe that it has not been properly taught. However, students have granted this competence a medium relevance position (=4.47) compared to the rest of competences.
In order to achieve our second goal, which is to compare the level of development, command and relevance of the degree competences more related to school cohabitation, the Friedman test was used. It shows significant differences ($p < .05$) between the development, command and relevance of CGT4, CET4(b) and CET15 competences, as shown in table 3.

A similar pattern can be observed in the three competences: the development is always lower than the command the students claim to possess (both are above 3 which means a regular development and command according to our scale). This is not the same for the CET15 competence whose development and command is under 3, which indicates a low learning and acquisition during the subjects. However, the relevance the students grant to each competence is always higher.

Table 3. Comparison among the development, command and relevance of the competences directly related to school cohabitation (Friedman test).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competences</th>
<th>Friedman test</th>
<th>Development</th>
<th>Command</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CGT4. Acquisition of interpersonal skills that smoothen relationships within the school community</td>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>92,673</td>
<td>101,959</td>
<td>11,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET4(b). Promotion of the inside and outside the classroom cohabitation</td>
<td>Gl</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET15. Command of organizational strategies and mediation skills for an adequate relationship with families</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides, Friedman test allow us to compare the development, command and relevance levels among the three competences and to establish the existence of significant differences ($p < .05$), as shown in table 4. This leads us to determine that CET4(b) means the competences the students claim to develop and master the most while CET15 is the least valued. However, the relevance for this two competences is quite similar and CGT4 is the least of the three of them in this, according to this criteria.

Table 4. Comparison among the levels of development, command and relevance of the three competences directly related to school cohabitation.

4. Conclusions

From the above mentioned results we can conclude that generally speaking the most developed, commanded and important competence is CET4(b) which seeks to promote cohabitation inside and outside the classroom. However, in comparison with all other specific competences we can determine that, even if it is one of the most commanded, it is not one the most developed nor important one. These results make us wonder whether the students are aware of the importance of promoting and boosting school cohabitation in centers nowadays. Besides,
as we formerly discussed in the introduction of this paper, the set in motion of a proper cohabiting environment is a challenging task involving many individual, family, school and social factors which must be dealt with (López, Domínguez, & Álvarez, 2010).

We are also concerned about the gap among development, command and relevance, where this last factor is always higher than the others and the second one higher than the first. This should make us think about the situation of the university teaching personnel. Does they have any difficultyness in focusing on untraditional curricular material? In this regard, the teaching personnel opinion maybe interesting, although current studies, such as the one by Álvarez Rojo et al. (2011), suggest that university teachers detect higher needs in education in those competences related to more up-to-date material that include the European Space for Higher Education issues into the college education.

Finally, we would like to point out one clear conclusion that we obtain from this paper: school cohabitation is everyone’s task. Teaching personnel, during its early and continuous education, must acquire and develop several competences that will help him to prepare for cohabitating and conflict situations at his turn (Grupo SI(e)TE Educación, 2010). For this purpose, teachers will count on the help, collaboration and involvement of the rest of the school community (Carpio & Tejero, 2012). Therefore, we believe that an effort must be made in order to balance the development of the degree competences through all the subjects and to grant the same relevance the students grant to the social, participation and personal competences which will result in the boosting of one of teachers’ basic functions: contributing to the respect, tolerant, participating and freedom environment that must prevail in every school activity to pass on to the student the values of a democratic citizenship.

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