Curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and communication

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is that of determining the prerequisites of a curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and communication. Our study focuses on the following two objectives: a) the content analysis of theoretical models at a national and international level regarding curricular innovations from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences and b) the identification of the representations of teachers activating in the domains of Language Didactics regarding the categories of pedagogical competences. The results of our study are reflected in a curricular innovative model focused on the pedagogical competences at the disciplines from the Language and communication curricular area .

Keywords: pedagogical competences, curricular innovations, initial training programmes, Language Didactics

1. Introduction – innovative research in the field of teaching languages

Our research is part of a larger project in which we have established as main objectives the exploration of the models of curricular innovation regarding the programmes of initial training of teachers from Europe in comparison with the Romanian model and the designing of an original curricular model focused on pedagogical competences for teachers of Language and Communication.

The activities that have led us so far in our research and that will lead us to formulating later conclusions are: the analysis of special literature at a national and European level, the identification of the current curricular models at the level of the programmes of initial training, the meta-analysis of the identified curricular models, the selecting of current approaches and theories referring to forming pedagogical competences, the determining of categories of pedagogical competences relevant to the disciplines in the Language and Communication curricular area, the correlation of models of curricular innovation with the structural model of pedagogical competences, the application and dissemination of the results of our research.

1.1. The basics of the curricular innovative model focused on developing the pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and Communication

The basic model that we have tried to outline after the research we have performed has started from a content analysis of some studies made in the areas of the four concepts that are the basis of our research (curricular innovations, pedagogical competences, the programme of teachers initial training and Language Didactics) regarding the aspect of teaching language as a synergic process that has to take into consideration all these aspects. As a result of the analysis of the models proposed in these directions of research at a national and European level we have attempted to build our own model which includes multiple variables imposed by the practice of teaching languages.

1.1.a. Curricular innovations

The analysis of the models of curricular innovations at both a national and a European level revealed major deficiencies in respecting two major principles: the students’ needs and the adaptation of methods, procedures and techniques of teaching to the specificity of each discipline. The models of implementation of some techniques of teaching languages that proved successful, surpassing these impediments, were the ones that projected the teaching of languages on the background of some innovative curricular syllabi by focusing upon developing pedagogical competences and upon the real needs and capacities of the agents of innovation (the teachers) and of the subjects of education (the students).

Thus, a diachronic approach to the concept of curricular innovation (Sharma, 2005) reveals this aspect as “an idea, practice or material artefact perceived to be new by the relevant unit of adoption” or as a structured process – “the emergence, import or imposition of new ideas which are pursued towards implementation, through interpersonal discussion, and successive remoulding of the original proposal over time” – but also as a process that has to take into consideration variables such as generating ideas, the degree of novelty, the intentionality of the process, the actors (individuals, groups, organizations), the relevance, the level of accepting the new and the results obtained within the process.

Other studies (Rogers, 1995) that concentrate on the idea of diffusion of innovation, regard innovation as a process that is developed throughout five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation, a perspective to which we would add an extra initial stage of study of needs. The implementation of some curricular models based on innovation also has to take into consideration other aspects such as: the need and relevance of implementation, feasibility, compatibility, trialability, complexity, explicitness, originality, observability (Markee, 1997) thus, surpassing obstacles at the level of the individual, the group or the organization such as motivation, cognitive ability, structure and work environment, styles of leadership, aspects concerning the strategy and resource management. (Anderson et al., 2004)

The attempts to identify some pertinent models of teaching languages have started from the endeavour to overcome three major obstacles: the lack of some models based mainly on curricular innovations in the research at the national level, the lack of some models of teaching languages that could be adapted/ personalized to the specificity of the discipline and the lack of programmes of training in this direction for teachers through the programmes of initial training. Thus, there were identified seven important models of education based on the implementation of some innovative schemes that include in their large majority the development of pedagogical competences:

- the first model proposed (Johnson, 1989) proposes the implementation of some educational syllabi based on innovation as a process that requires a thorough study of formulating educational policies, of planning and developing a valid programme, of training teachers and of evaluating the entire process;
a second model (Markee, 1997) insists upon the inter-relating between curricular development and professional development in a process of diffusion of innovation that needs to have at its basis the development of the communicational method;

the third model (Lamie, 2004) focuses strictly upon developing competences in using combined languages by creating a context for learning which is as realistic as possible;

another model in our analysis (Lawrenz et al., 2005) makes the connection between the basic curriculum and the educational practices taking into consideration numerous variables that are connected to the educational context;

the fifth model (Waters & Vilches, 2005) insists upon teaching languages starting from contents towards grammar the entire educational process being developed in a context of strong collaboration between agents, subjects and resources;

the last but one model we have identified (Ofsted, 2008) insists upon teaching languages through themes and interdisciplinary approaches, upon the flexibility of the curriculum and of the teaching time, upon offering curricular alternatives, upon developing pedagogical competences and the collaboration between schools and agents;

the last model identified in our research (Ogilvie, 2010) takes into consideration both philosophical aspects and methodological ones also insisting on the importance of the stage of teachers’ initial training (and not necessarily continuous).

The conclusion that forms itself is the one that only an integrative innovative model can truly develop students’ language capacities and can answer their needs of future professional development.

1.1.b. Pedagogical competences

In what pedagogical competences are concerned, our research concentrated on three levels – the individual, the group, the organization, a triad to which we add the larger sphere of the entire community – taking into consideration a multitude of variables of psychological, interactional, organizational, managerial, administrative, social, economic, cultural (ethnical, religious, of gender, class, age, etc.) nature. The attempts to define the concept regard the issue as the capacity to master and operate with the concepts of a discipline (Barnett, 1994), as a minimal professional standard through which a person fulfils the attributes of teaching (Gliga, 2002), a complex of collaborative actions with the purpose of developing pedagogy (Ryegård, 2010), an ability of performing some specific activities with educational purposes (Prins et al., 2008), an ability of coordinated, synergic use of resources (Madhavaram, Laverie, 2010).

The definition we propose has at its basis criteria of implementation and development of the pedagogical competences. Thus, one has to take into consideration aspects such as: stages of development (transmitting/teaching contents, including it into a network, applying, combining it, reaching performance/ forming competence), components (information, contents, knowledge, abilities, performance, effectiveness), factors (physical, intellectual, behavioural, instrumental, actional), context (educational, psychological, interactional, organizational, social, economic, cultural), level of application (individual, team, group, institution, community), purpose (the individual’s development, increasing motivation for learning, developing responsibilities, developing the curriculum).

1.1.c. The programme of initial training

A study of the models of initial training at the European level has revealed a strong focusing upon the concepts of flexibility and adaptability to the new requirements imposed by the economic, political and cultural context, all this in a society that needs competently professionally trained specialists.

As a result of an analysis of 11 models of initial training at the European level, we could observe that some have taken a course of drastic change, which led most of the time to positive results, others are in full change and others are still struggling in old models of implementation. Thus, if in countries such as Austria, England, the Netherlands changes have been made so as to answer the societal pressures of career-oriented market smoothing the transition from studenthood to employment and diminishing the distance between theory and practice, in others such as France or Germany or even Romania programmes for the implementation of curricula have been drafted starting from clearly defined objectives and variables or transformations have been operated in the nature of educational institutions so as to reinstate a realistic training, in countries such as Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, or Poland such attempts are still in initial phase due to a lack of realistic assessment of teachers, or a lack of practical thinking or resources.
We can observe an insistence upon some aspects that concern the teaching focused on pupil/student as well as aspects such as the degree of responsiveness, collaboration and flexibility considered as essential features for the new teaching-learning. Thus, what is encouraged is a pro-active attitude on the part of teachers, with the engaging in fora of activity that include students, teachers and the institutions of education.

1.1.c. The didactics of language

According to current approaches (Araujo e Sa, 1998, Springer, 2004), our research has as its basis a model of the didactics of language based on developing competences as a scientific discipline within the larger frame of humanistic and social sciences. From this perspective, the teaching of languages is a discipline that is structured according to two purposes: the transmission of knowledge about teaching-learning languages and social intervention in education. Therefore, Language Didactics constitutes both a discipline of scientific observation and of social intervention in the institutes of education. The explorations, the knowledge produced, the methods employed at the level of the Language Didactics discipline are neither borrowed, nor used or involved, but rather recreated and administered in accordance with the functionality regarding concrete problems that occur in teaching languages.

1.2. The basics of the operational model of pedagogical competences relevant for the discipline of Language and Communication curricular area

An analysis of the taxonomies we have studied in connection with pedagogical competences reveals a focusing on general competences, didactic, methodical and pedagogical competences connected strictly to the discipline (of formulating objectives, of identifying and planning types of activities, of correlating the theory with the practice, of expressing, monitoring and evaluating students, of self-evaluation), managerial competences, of communication, of solving conflicts, of IT, socio-moral competences (Marbeau & Audigier, 1990, Ormrod, 1998, Gherhinescu, 2003, Gliga, 2002, Bankauskiene et al., 2005, Petrovici, 2006, Rodzevičiūtė, 2006, Jäenecke, 2007, Prins et al., 2008, Madhavaram et al., 2010, Schneckenberg & Wildt, 2010).

All these groupings have as a common denominator a series of variables such as: contents of teaching, managerial capacities, development of relations, aspects concerning pedagogy and psychology, communication, culture, art, ethics, technology, practice, curriculum, innovation, effectiveness.

We can also deduce a series of inconsistencies as a result of the taxonomies of pedagogical competences (technological, psycho-social, of career management, of classroom management, etc.); the various perspectives upon criteria of classification; the lack of correlation between categories of pedagogical competences (technological, psychosocial, of classroom and career management, etc.); the various perspectives upon criteria of classification; the lack of correlation of categories of pedagogical competences with the specificity of some programmes, syllabi or stages of teachers training.

Therefore, we propose the following taxonomy of pedagogical competences, as a result of representative approaches to the classification of pedagogical competences:

- **general pedagogical competences**:
  - combining the forms and dimensions of education;
  - respecting the requirements of the didactic principles;
  - integrating curricular approaches;
  - establishing the purposes of education;
  - transposing educational contents;
  - selecting the methods and procedures of teaching-learning;
  - using didactic means appropriately;
  - combining forms of organization;
  - planning the didactic activity;
  - evaluating the process of education.

- **specific pedagogical competences**:
  - for different levels of education (preschool, primary, secondary, higher, post-graduate);
  - for various types of institutions (special school);
  - for the forms of education (formal education, non-formal and informal);
  - for various specializations (Language and Communication, Mathematics and Sciences, etc.).

The general categories of competences represent the starting point in outlining the investigative undertaking of analytical type of the operational model of pedagogical competences relevant to the disciplines from the Language and Communication curricular area. The structure we propose constitutes the scientific model after which we will
establish the instruments of research for the investigation of the possibilities of curricular innovation for the programmes of initial training at the level of the disciplines from the Language and Communication curricular area from the perspective of pedagogical competences.

In the practical part, two types of research are used:

a) the fundamental research – that has as a purpose exploring educational theories and policies at a national and European level from the perspective of the models of curricular innovation and pedagogical competences;

b) observational research – in which we aim to investigate teachers’ representations from higher education regarding the curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of languages and communication.

The starting point in the realization of our study is represented by a fundamental and operational model of pedagogical competences. These models have been developed in a previous work based on interviews with experts in the domain of Educational Sciences. In the practice of our work there was developed the first form of a curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and Communication.

2. Research on the curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and Communication

2.1. The objectives and hypotheses

The objectives

The first objective of this study is the analysis of theoretical models at national and international level regarding the curricular innovations from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences. The second objective is to determine representations of the teachers in the domains of Language Didactics towards the categories of pedagogical competences at the disciplines in the Language and Communication curricular area.

The Hypotheses of the Investigation

The first hypothesis:

The theoretical models at national and international level included aspects regarding curricular innovations from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences.

The second hypothesis:

The teachers from the domain of Language Didactics elaborate the syllabi by criteria or standards, proposed at the level of the educational policy.

The third hypothesis:

The teachers from the domain of Language Didactics elaborate the syllabi by a grid of general pedagogical competences.

The fourth hypothesis:

Teachers appreciate more certain categories of general pedagogical competences in the elaboration of the syllabi for Language Didactics.

The fifth hypothesis:

Teachers agree on developing an innovative model for Language Didactics based on pedagogical competences.

2.2. The operationalization of concepts and definition of variables

The main concept of pedagogical competence was developed in ten main categories: the combination of education forms and dimensions, the respecting didactic principles demands, the integration of curricular approaches, the elaboration of finalities of education, the transposition of educational contents, the application of methods and techniques of teaching and learning, the proper use of didactic tools, the combination forms of organization of teaching activity, the didactic activity design, the evaluation of didactic activities.

In the case of the content analysis, the dependent variable is represented by the categories of theoretical models regarding the curricular innovations from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences, while the independent variables are the level of analysis (international and national).

In identifying the subjects’ representations, the dependent variable used is the appreciation of the importance of the categories concerning pedagogical competences at the level of the Language Didactics discipline. In order to establish this variable, the subjects were asked to evaluate each category, according to its importance.

2.3. Subjects

52 teachers from the domain of Language Didactics were involved in this study. The teachers who have completed the questionnaire are from different universities from Romania: University of București, “1 Decembrie
1918” University of Alba Iulia, “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, “Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad, “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău.

2.4. Methodology

In order to identify the curricular innovative model, the content analysis (Agabrian, 2006) was used in order to distinguish the themes and the specific categories of pedagogical competences. The questionnaire was the main instrument that was used for the representations of the teachers in the domains of Language Didactics towards the categories of pedagogical competences at the disciplines of Language and Communication. (Antonesei, 2009).

In this research we developed a questionnaire for capturing a curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and Communication at the level of teachers’ perception in terms of their openness to new teaching model. The items of the questionnaire recover the results of the fundamental and observational research.

The questionnaire for the identification of the perception of teachers of Language Didactics towards the manner in which students’ pedagogical competences are developed is structured on several dimensions:
- the appreciation of the manner of developing the syllabi according to criteria or standards, the proposed level of educational policy (item 1 and 2);
- the appreciation of the manner of developing the syllabi according to a grid of pedagogical competences (item 3 and 4);
- the selection of relevant categories of pedagogical competences for Language Didactics at the first level of the psychological and pedagogical module (item 5);
- the importance given to specific pedagogical competences will be developed predominantly through initial training programme for teachers of disciplines in the Language and Communication curricular area (item 6);
- assessing the need for a curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and Communication (item 7 and 8).

2.5. Data presentation and Analysis

The first hypothesis is partially confirmed because the only theoretical models at an international level include the aspects regarding curricular innovations from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences.

The qualitative analysis of theoretical models at a national level based on the curricular innovations from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences contributes to establishing the main conclusion. In the Romanian educational system, there are neither theoretical models, nor is there research, or programmes aimed at developing innovative curricular programmes focused on developing pedagogical competencies for teachers of Language and communication.

The second hypothesis is not confirmed, because the teachers from the domain of Language Didactics do not elaborate the syllabi by criteria or standards, proposed at the level of the educational policy. Only 30,8% develop the syllabi after standards, while 69,2% do not take into account any criterion (Figure 1).

Figure 1 The graphic representation of percentages regarding the elaboration of syllabi by criteria or standards in the perception of the teachers from the domain of Language Didactics

The third hypothesis is confirmed, because the teachers from the domain of Language Didactics elaborate the syllabi by a grid of general pedagogical competences. 65,4% relate to the relevant categories and only 34,6% of them do not do this (Figure 2).
The fourth hypothesis is confirmed, because the teachers appreciate more certain categories of general pedagogical competences in the elaboration of the syllabi for Language Didactics. The analysis of means indicates the following hierarchy of categories of general pedagogical competences in the perception of teachers from Language Didactics (Figure 3): didactic activity design; evaluation of didactic activities (1,00); the application of methods and techniques of teaching and learning; elaboration of finalities of education (0,85); combining forms of organization of teaching activity (0,73); combination of education forms and dimensions, proper use of didactic tools (0,56); respect of didactic principles; transposition of educational contents (0,38); integration of curricular approaches (0,23).

The fifth hypothesis is confirmed, because the teachers in our research agree upon developing an innovative model for Language Didactics based on pedagogical competences. 92,3% of the teachers agree upon the necessity of an innovative model and 7,7% disagree with this aspect (Figure 4).
3. Conclusions

The results of our research have contributed to determining the prerequisites of a curricular innovative model focused on developing pedagogical competences of teachers of Language and Communication:

- Only theoretical models at international level include the aspects regarding curricular innovations from the perspective of developing pedagogical competences.
- Teachers do not elaborate the syllabi of Language Didactics by criteria or standards, proposed at the level of the educational policy from the Romanian academic education.
- Teachers elaborate the syllabi of Language Didactics by a grid of general pedagogical competences.
- The categories of general pedagogical competences most appreciated by teachers in the elaboration of the syllabi for Language Didactics are: design and evaluation of didactic activities.
- Teachers agree upon developing an innovative model for Language Didactics based on pedagogical competences.

References


