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The Effects of Gender on the Teachers' Competences and Effectiveness

Abstract

This research examines how gender roles are affecting teachers' professional development (TPD) in Hungary. Are there significant differences in the career path between male and female teachers? What kind of degrees do they have? How they have chosen their in-service training? Is the longer and – according to the literature – more effective training more popular? Many researchers examined what makes TPD effective. The TALIS 2013 (OECD, 2013) listed the features of high-quality TPD, which are: content focus; collective participation; active learning; duration (longer term TPD programs are more effective) and coherence. There are only a few Anglo-Saxon researchers, who examined the gender specificities of the teaching profession, even though the teacher's role is definitely related to gender roles. The probability that one chooses the teaching career and later leaves or stays are not independent from the teacher's feminine image and the status of the teaching profession. The results show that the use of diverse teaching methods, following teaching novelties and participation in high-standard further education are more important for women. At the same time, for male teachers the transfer of knowledge and scientific career are more important. We see one of the traditional masculine-feminine dichotomies: knowledge or personality centeredness. This means that academic knowledge, the development of theoretical knowledge appear much more emphatically with men; and the intention of getting to know the personal problems of students or the pursuit of equal opportunities with women.

Keywords: teacher training, gender, competences, continuous professional development

Introduction

The research on the teachers' career path, efficiency and commitment has got greater and greater emphasis in the past years, however, it is not yet obvious what a 'good' teacher is like. The teacher's role is complex and incidental; and because it is difficult to describe, the skills needed for the practice of the profession often reflect personality traits that one must be 'born with' (Fónai, 2012; Papp, 2001). Early research on efficiency tried to investigate the characteristics needed for the teachers, however there is still a professional discourse on the personality traits, abilities or systems of abilities that are said to be ideal. Of course there are measurable characteristics like qualifications or knowledge of the subject but they do not linearly affect the performance of the students. According to the scholarly literature there is a stronger correlation, for instance, between effectiveness and reflectivity or the use of various teaching methods, however, these are far more difficult to apprehend (Bacsikai, 2015; Trentinné Benkő, 2015). During the last decade the literature aimed to describe the adequate competences instead of the needed characteristics. The interpretation of the concept of competence is not uniform. Today, the concept of competence is associated with professional development, so

much so that professional development means the development of teacher's competences; including attitudes, values and knowledge. Latest research also indicates that self-reflection is important. The advancement and the development of the teacher competences starts during teacher training and under optimal conditions it continues during the years spent with teaching (Falus, 2001; Ganser, 2000; Korom, 2010; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The clear use of the concept of competence is made difficult by the fact that this is also used for the teacher advancement and rating system in many countries, however, we can find crucial differences between certain systems. The elaboration of standards started in the United States (US) at the beginning of the 1990s. Today, the Anglo-Saxon systems are all built on standards, which have to be met for completing each educational level. In the US we can find different indicators in every state so the systems are not uniform. In the United Kingdom (UK) there are some differences among the member states: for instance, the English carrier model has 5, while the Scottish model has 3+3 levels, although both contain professional values and competences.

As in the US, Central and Eastern European countries such as Slovakia, Hungary and Romania have developed similar system of teachers' advancement. These countries tried to adopt the US system; therefore teacher competences became a central concept in these systems. The advancement to higher degree occurs after specified years in practice and completion of the exams (Bikics, 2011; Bordás, 2015; Felméry, 2011; Kovács, 2015; Nagy, 2015; Németh, 2015).

The researchers of the Education Research and Development Institute in Hungary, between 2013 and 2015, examined what in-service teachers think about these competences and the overall carrier model. The comparison relied on the self-evaluation of the professional competences of career entrants and teachers with longer working experience. In most fields of competence – for example, supporting, organizing and managing learning – career entrants gave lower values for themselves, which can be explained in the context of different lengths of professional practice. However, in two fields: (a) pedagogical development and innovation and (b) the field of analysis and research career, entrants and more experienced teachers considered themselves not sufficiently advanced (Sági & Szemerszki, 2016).

It is also important to mention that the gender stereotypes do exist. For instance, the competences such as caring or success in personal relationships are attributed more to women. Meanwhile, competences such as good leadership skill or success in sciences are attributed to men. The effective teacher, in all teachers' fields of competences, needs to have characteristics which are more feminine (e.g. tolerance, sociability) and more masculine (e.g. self-advocacy and firmness) regardless of their gender. However, according to some researchers, a teacher with more feminine characteristics performs poorly in some, stereotypically considered masculine, actions such as assertiveness, self-reflection and leadership (Figula, 2000; Szabó, 1997; 1998). Nonetheless, researchers rarely take gender in consideration.

Research methodology

In this paper, I am going to examine whether gender is an influence factor in the field of competences. The research is based on the database of the TELEMACHUS 2014 (TEachers' LEarning Motivation and AChievement in eastern part of Hungary Survey). The data collection was done by the researchers of the Centre of Higher

Education Research and Development at the University of Debrecen (CHERD-Hungary) between 1 October and 15 November 2014. The participants completed paper-based questionnaires, which were then supplemented with an online data collection carried out in the districts of the public educational institutions with pedagogical training at the University of Debrecen. The database included the responses of 1056 respondents. The age and gender characteristic of the sample are representative of the characteristics of Hungarian teachers.

Because of the applied questions we have to raise the attention to the fact that the demand of trainings and the existing knowledge do not correlate according to our experience. In an earlier research, which explored students in teacher training in Debrecen, we found great differences between female and male students. Female students generally asked for a longer time of training than male students: more than half of the male sample wanted to have a half-year training while only one third of the women agreed with this; the level of significance was $P=0,021$. In connection to the different gender socialization, Kereszty (2014) brought attention to the fact that women have a more positive attitude towards learning and drive in school to meet the expectations. We took this into consideration when analysing the demands for training in certain fields of competence. In our block of questions we inquired from teachers what further training was needed for certain tasks and problems? The reported competences have emphasized significance in the advancement of life career model in Hungary: the future professional ratings depend on the development of competences and the earlier mentioned exams.

Results

Many of the teacher respondents would like to have training on effective problem-solving: 86.1 percent of them gave a positive, yes answer to this possibility. There is also a higher rate for further training on the development of students' personalities (81.5 percent) and supporting students' learning.

On the other end of the scale, there are two trainings or fields of competence which were supported by only half of the respondents. These are support for equality, integrational activities (50.5 percent) and the evaluation and analysis of pedagogical processes (52 percent). For the latter one, it is worth mentioning that 'the planning of pedagogical activities and self-reflection' was also rated as one of the less important tasks. Therefore, it seems that self-reflection, though its significance is often emphasized, does not play such an important role in the everyday practice of teachers.

We found significant differences between male and female teachers, and between the levels of education. The extensive analysis of the data shows that women are more willing to take part in any further training than men. In the same way, the demand for general training is decreasing from kindergarten teachers towards the secondary school teachers. We can assume that in case only significant differences were examined then in most cases the results would show that more women would like to take part in training than men (and more kindergarten teachers than secondary school teachers). Looking at the rankings of certain tasks according to gender, we can see really significant – more than two ranks apart – differences in case of three fields. The ranking was based on the proportion of those who wanted to develop these competences. The development of the student's personality and the

development of SNI (students with special needs), BTM (students with behavioural disorder) students and the preparedness for integrated education are more important for women: they put the first one second as opposed to the men who put it in the sixth place; the second got the seventh place for women and the same got to the twelfth place, which is the last but one. Academic knowledge, however, is much more important for men; it is ranked fourth on the scale while it is only ranked in the eight places in the case of women.

We also examined whether there is a traceable relationship among the importance of the mentioned competences and whether there are any fields of competence that qualify to be developed for a group of teachers. During the factor analysis I managed to establish 3 factors, named Professional development centred, Equality and student centred and Learning centred teachers. I used Maximum likelihood method.

Professional development and analysis of pedagogical processes were of high priority for teachers in the professional development centred factor. Besides that, communication, cooperation and problem solving were emphasized. In the second factor the emphasis was placed on the development of the students' personality, support for equality and integrational activity, the development of SNI, BTM students and methodological preparedness for integrated education. This factor, therefore, received the name of equality and student-centred. In the third, learning centred factor the academic knowledge was the most important followed by the support of the students' learning and organizing teaching activities and the related reflection ability. Regarding gender, the equality and student centred factor shows a strongly significant difference: it is not surprising that women are overrepresented in this traditionally more feminine factor which puts care and provision in the forefront. The second factor is interesting in connection with leaving the teaching career but the correlation is less strong: those who are part of this group are more devoted to the teaching career. It seems that this is the kind of teacher image that meets the real expectations.

For the sake of further possible correlations, I used multivariate analysis (made regression models) to see whether fields of competence in one indicator relate to any other characteristics as well. The first model had only the gender, the second had gender and level of education and the third model included the previous fields with cultural and financial capital and the type of the settlement of the permanent residency.

In case of the professional development-centred factor, we found significant correlation with their qualifications, while there is no perceptible effect of the other indicators of cultural or financial capital. In case of teachers getting their first degree in a college the correlation is negative; therefore they find these competences less important, while teachers getting university degree – as first or second degree – had these indicators have a higher chance of application. It seems that getting the qualification of a university degree is the most important influential factor, independent from the fact whether it is a first, second or third degree.

In case of equality and student-centred factor the gender has the highest effect and this does not change after taking more variants in consideration. In the case of secondary school teachers these indicators of competence appear with a lower chance, which was also evident in the cross-analysis. At the same time, it is interesting that after including the indicators of the cultural and financial capitals,

the significant difference between the levels of teaching disappears. It could be a matter of further research to see which factors cause these effects; we can assume that the nature of the obtained degree is a modifying factor as our earlier analyses showed that among those with a university degree the value of the academic knowledge increases. In case of including more variants with the learning-centred factor, it does not show any correlation with any attributes.

Conclusions

Analysing the factors with regards to the fields of competence, we see that there is no difference in the factors connecting to learning and teaching with regards to gender. Support for equality, personality centeredness, use of diverse teaching methods and professional rejuvenation is more important for women. But there is no difference in gender in terms of competences regarding the importance of knowledge not even in fields of competence that include cooperation, problem-solving and evaluating pedagogical processes. Therefore, some of the feminine expectations connected to the teacher's role are more fit to the role perception of women, in other respects; however, we do not see a difference. According to stereotypes, innovation is a masculine feature, yet it is more important for women; the reason for this could be a matter of further research.

Some of the fields of competence are important for all teachers, for example, development of competences of effective problem-solving or supporting the students' learning. One of the traditional masculine-feminine dichotomy can be detected, namely knowledge or personality centeredness meaning that academic knowledge, consisting of the development of theoretical knowledge appear much more emphatically with men than the intention of getting to know the personal problems of students or the pursuit of equal opportunities with women. It is interesting that the development of the students' personalities is equally important for both women and men, however, men want to achieve it indirectly, during their lessons.

Another difference in gender is that the use of diverse teaching methods, following teaching novelties and participation in high-standard further education, are measurably more important for women. This can be caused by several factors. For instance, it is possible that some of the male teachers stick more to the frontal teaching methods while female teachers have a more positive attitude towards professional development. For the effective realization of the teacher's role, however, independently from gender, the importance of the mentioned competences would be adherent, so in case of men, it could be a matter of further research on how their attitudes could be made more positive.

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