



SOCIAL COMPETENCIES AS THE FOUNDATION OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL POTENTIAL

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Abstract. The article has been devoted to the issue of social competencies of teachers, which are vital to achieve success on professional and general grounds in the changing social reality. It includes a description of social competencies based on the model of social competencies by Anna Matczak. The foundation for the empirical study have been the factor scales divided by the author as those concerning competencies determining effectiveness of functioning in intimate situations, competencies determining effectiveness of functioning in situations demanding assertiveness and competencies determining effectiveness of functioning in situations demanding social exposure. The obtained results of the study conducted among teachers prove that most of teachers are characterised by mediocre level of social competencies in the field of behaviours of intimate situations, as well as those behaviours that demand assertiveness or social exposure.

KOMPETENCJE SPOŁECZNE PODSTAWĄ POTENCJAŁU ZAWODOWEGO NAUCZYCIELI

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje społeczne, nauczyciel, asertywność, ekspozycja społeczna, relacje interpersonalne

Streszczenie. Artykuł poświęcono problematyce kompetencji społecznych nauczycieli, niezbędnych do osiągnięcia sukcesu życiowego i zawodowego w zmieniającej się rzeczywistości społecznej. Przedstawiono w nim opis kompetencji społecznych opartych na modelu kompetencji społecznych autorstwa Anny Matczak. Wyodrębnione przez autorkę skale czynnikowe dotyczące kompetencji warunkujących efektywność zachowań w sytuacjach intymnych,

kompetencji warunkujących efektywność zachowań w sytuacjach wymagających asertywności i ekspozycji społecznej stały się podstawą badań empirycznych. Uzyskane wyniki badań przeprowadzonych wśród nauczycieli pozwalają stwierdzić, że większość nauczycieli charakteryzuje się jedynie przeciętnym poziomem kompetencji społecznych w zakresie zachowań w sytuacjach intymnych, zachowań wymagających asertywności i ekspozycji społecznej.

Introduction

Social competencies of teachers have been a topic recently discussed in context of training new staff members and the quality of performing professional responsibilities. Substantial, psycho-pedagogical or methodological competencies that have been perceived as professional so far and which have been strongly stressed and broadly described, are not enough anymore. Social competencies become vital as they determine the consistency of human behaviour with the needs and expectations of the society, ability to reconcile individual needs with the needs of society, and capability to deal with differences between goals of individual and social importance (Wierzejewska, 2016, s. 156).

An ability crucial for everyone who works with other people on daily basis – as is the case of teachers – is being able to establish effective relation with social surrounding, and that is determined not by one specific skill, but co-existence of numerous skills, defined by Anna Matczak as „complex skills determining effectiveness of being able to cope in certain social situations, acquired by an individual through social practice” (Matczak, 2007, s. 6-7).

Teachers are therefore a group of professionals in case of which sensible and fruitful contacts with other people are vital, while the abilities and social competencies determine the effectiveness of how an individual would function in real-life situations (Jarmużek, 2014, s. 214). The ongoing changes distinctive for the informative society, such as the ability to quickly learn new skills, accepting challenges, remaining open to new experiences, innovation of ideas and actions, ability to adapt socially and professionally, as well as functioning in modern social and professional roles, will not omit education – the field in which not only the curriculum is constantly updated, but the teachers' preparation and professional activity is updated too. The increasing role of individual's activity in providing services in various domains of life in which he or she is expected to satisfy the needs of others, demands direct social relations with them. Mastering the ability of social coexistence is an important determiner of happiness and satisfaction. That is why social competencies of teachers significantly influence

their effectiveness at work – through the already mastered abilities of social co-existence, they automatically increase the happiness and satisfaction emerging from the job they practice. Nowadays there are more and more cases of teachers who cannot resolve conflicts among students, instead trying to be in control of anything that takes place in the classroom and prevail over all the students' behaviours. They set for themselves goals which are demanding, if not impossible to achieve, condemning themselves to permanent fatigue and unhappiness – which lead, in turn, to the risk of professional burnout (Jarmużek, 2014, s. 214). The necessity of possessing key social skills makes functioning in a society and optimization of stress easier not only for the teachers, but also for the students. It should be also mentioned that the need to develop social competencies – focusing on the key competencies of students and teachers – has also been defined by the European Union as an answer to the challenge of the changing world.

Taking into consideration those assumptions, an empirical study among active primary school teachers has been conducted, the aim of which was to diagnose their social competencies. The study was conducted with the use of Social Competencies Questionnaire created by Anna Matczak (Matczak, 2007).

Model of social competencies

The concept of social competencies has dominated modern views on education focused on preparing of a young person to enter adulthood. The term itself has been within the field of interest of those educators and psychologists who noticed that achieving life goals demands not only general intelligence, but also other skills. Social competencies are defined as unique features of an individual expressed through skills of adequate behaviour and expressing one's needs according to existing social rules and standards. They are perceived as features that are incredibly desired and exceptionally useful in everyday life. A competent person can consciously express himself or herself and create the surrounding reality, as well as perceive oneself as a member of social life. Such activity is tightly connected to the skills shown through various achievements and actions taken (Okoń, 1996).

Taking into consideration the fact that social competencies should create commonly accepted values and serve as a tool to achieve certain social goals, one should wonder about the elementary ingredients that contribute to them. Jan Borkowski claims that continuous learning and improvement, openness towards new knowledge, curiosity about the world as well as knowledge about oneself

as a social subject and knowledge of the rules governing how a community works are the foundations for the so-called social knowledge. Such knowledge can lead to a peculiar pro-community way of thinking, expressed by being interested and sensitive towards the needs and capabilities of others. Such way of thinking or such an attitude, in turn, can be described as pro-community thought, social mentality.

One of these ingredients named by the author is social experience, which is made up of life experience (family, friends, colleagues, institutional activity, school environment) and professional experience. A decent indicator of it is the scope of personal successes and failures, as well as the way those failures are handled (Borkowski, 2003).

Other important ingredients of social competencies according to J. Borkowski, are also personal virtues, so all those features that make up the so-called social personality. Being able to read and understand individual's emotions and the emotions of others, as well as behaviours and attitudes adequately chosen to cope with them are, generally speaking, another element of social competencies called emotional intelligence. The author also describes social intelligence, which is the ability to resolve conflicts and problems, to cooperate and coexist with others, to be morally mature, and to possess social authority and various other skills and abilities (Borkowski, 2003). A high level of social competencies is also tied to better adjustment to life changes, better flexibility of behaviours and attitudes in various social situations and lower rate of fear, depression or loneliness. Among people with high IQ, those who have performed outstandingly on professional and personal grounds are precisely those, who are characterized by a distinctive need to achieve, an emotional stability and a social adjustment – so all of the features and competencies that constitute to social and emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills (Terelak, 2001). A. Matczak has defined the relations between social competencies, social intelligence and emotional intelligence. In her view, social competencies emerge as a result of social practice, and the effectiveness of such practice depends on individual intellectual capabilities – especially on social and emotional intelligence. The former one is an ability to process behavioural information about other people, whereas the latter one deals with processing emotional information (Matczak, 2007, s. 7). The author believes that we are subjected to social training all our lives, and the influence of our surroundings together with the features of temperament and personality determine the quality, quantity and type of acquired social experiences. In her

Social Competencies Questionnaire, A. Matczak has separated the following factors:

1. Competencies determining effective functioning in intimate situations – requiring close interpersonal contacts, particularly important in social professions, where there is a need to analyse personal experience or problems of participants of the interaction.

2. Competencies determining effective functioning in situations demanding social exposure, in which an individual becomes an object of observation and assessment by others participating in the interaction.

3. Competencies determining effective functioning in situations calling for assertiveness, in which an individual pursues his or her own objectives and needs by either influencing others or being able to effectively resist the influence of others (Matczak, 2007, s. 11).

The first scale includes an ability to establish close interpersonal contacts. Each of us is constantly found in situations in which people interact with one another (Borkowski, 2003). Due to mutual acquisition of knowledge about one another, the level of sympathy and trust may rise. Moreover, a feeling of familiarity and intimacy emerges, which results in more satisfaction acquired from the contact. A person who does not communicate with others about intimate matters, sends a signal that he or she does not trust people, does not feel sympathy towards them and feels distant to them. It makes it difficult for others to be open towards such a person. There is a lack of close, intimate contact between such person and other people – he or she feels isolated and his or her relationships are shallow and hardly satisfying. Sharing information allowing others to know a person creates a stronger bond and deepens mutual contacts. On the other hand, hiding personal matters from others increases the distance to them. A decision to reveal any intimate details demands taking into consideration certain factors, such as: who are the people we are willing to share our matters with are, how much information can be shared or if the ongoing conversation is appropriate to confide personal information. Those factors also determine the consequences coming from being open towards others (Steward, 2000). Mutual contacts deprived of personal bonds and based on mutual dependence or compulsion of being together, are difficult and unpleasant for both sides (Argyle, 2002).

Another scale refers to assertiveness, which is the ability to honest, balanced and precise expression of personal thoughts, beliefs, feelings and desires in a socially accepted way without depriving others of doing the same thing.

Assertiveness is the ability to “admit” someone else to our unique inner world, so that this person can understand and respect us, and make use of the rich history of our personality. The foundation for assertiveness seen in such a way is trust that another human being can understand and respect my beliefs and feelings, my needs, rights and ideals, my identity and sensitivity. Assertiveness is also the ability thanks to which people openly speak their minds, feelings and beliefs without ignoring the feelings and beliefs of their interlocutors. Assertive people can reach a compromise without exposing their own dignity and conceding their own rights and they can say “no” without remorse, anger or fear. It is also the ability to defend individual rights in such a way that no guilt is felt and no rights of others are violated. The feelings are expressed only in such a manner, that other people’s rights remain inviolate (Król-Fijewska, 2000).

Helena Sęk presents the understanding of assertiveness as a set of trained skills. According to her, assertiveness is a group of personal skills determining behaviour in interpersonal situations, the aim of which is to implement personal and other values, development and protection of positive image of oneself and self-acceptance. Those behaviours include: unconstrained and controlled expression of positive and negative feelings; insistence on respect of individual rights; refusal of humiliation and aggressive behaviour; denial of requests and demands; agreeing or disagreeing with others’ assessment of oneself; turning to others for help or favour; initiating, sustaining or limiting communication with others.

Communication and interpersonal competencies also fall into this category, same as the ability to express and present oneself. According to this idea, assertiveness in a set of task, interpersonal and expressive competencies, shaped through the process of socialization, learning and acquiring experience. Whether the assertive skills will be revised as concrete assertive behaviours or not, highly depends on the situation and circumstances. The author believes that assertiveness plays a vital role in individual development as a mean to improve performing certain social tasks and roles, as well as in achieving a satisfactory level of mental health (Sęk, 1988).

The third and final scale contains competencies useful in situations of social exposure, so those in which an individual becomes an object of observation and potential assessment by numerous others. Those are the situations in which we may publicly show ourselves, our skills and knowledge (public speeches, conferences, reports, lectures, interviews, group leadership, etc.). In other words, those are the situations in which we are allowed to exist in a public domain – those in which we expect to gain respect and approval for our actions. They are

certainly stressful and they arouse fear of potentially negative review by the observers. Exposing oneself in such a situation requires mastering certain skills, such as the ability to manipulate our image, or – in other words – the competency of self-presentation (Kenrick, Neuberg, Cialdini, 2002, s. 185-187). The descriptors of social exposition situation require capturing another skill, which is behavioural self-control (Kenrick i in., 2002, s. 185-187). There is always a reasonable fear that driven by the anxiety of unsuccessful auto-presentation or by the will to satisfy our needs, we will lie – and that would result in losing the trust of those we care about most. In such a situation it is essential to be able to cope with stress, and the best way to do it is by shaping individual resistance to stressful situation and becoming familiar with strategies and styles of overcoming stress and developing self-controlling skills (including adequate self-evaluation, etc) (Borkowski, 2003).

The model of social competencies by A. Matczak presented above, was used as a basis for empirical studies. A Social Competencies Questionnaire (KKS) comprising 60 diagnostic items and 30 non-diagnostic items had been developed. The study was conducted among 106 primary school teachers, 84 of which are women and 22 are men. Participants were supposed to assess the effectiveness of actions and tasks they carry out by giving points from 1 to 4, where 1 is a definitely positive answer and 4 is a definitely negative answer. The diagnostic questions included in the questionnaire consisted of three detailed scales:

Scale 1. (KKS-I) skills determining effective functioning in intimate situations.

Scale 2. (KKS-A) skills determining effective functioning in situations calling for assertiveness.

Scale 3. (KKS-ES) skills determining effective functioning in situations demanding social exposure (Matczak, 2007).

For each scale (raw score) sten scores have been calculated and the acquired data has been divided into three groups: low (1-3 sten scores), average (4-7 sten scores) and high (8-10 sten scores).

Below are presented the results of the study as well as their interpretation. Table 1 includes a list of data acquired in the scale of teachers' competencies determining effective functioning in intimate situations and close interpersonal contacts, marked as KKS-I.

Table 1. KKS-I results of skills determining effectiveness in intimate situations

Group of respondents	Low sten scores	Average sten scores	High sten scores
Women	20%	62%	18%
Men	24%	59%	17%

Source: Author.

As seen in table 1, responding teachers have average results in terms of competencies determining effectiveness in intimate situations (KKS-I). 62% of women displayed an average level of tested skills, 20% low level and 18% high level. Among men 59% displayed an average level of tested skills, 24% low level and 17% high level. The data obtained from the study suggests that there is an average level of skills determining effectiveness in intimate situations among both men and women, estimated between 4-7 sten scores. It is evident that the differences between women and men are marginal on each level of functioning when it comes to skills determining effectiveness in intimate situations. A detailed analysis suggests that teachers are mediocre in handling close relations with others – those relations which require definitely much deeper skills allowing to create long-term bonds. Study results of skills determining effective functioning in situations calling for assertiveness (KKS-A) are presented in table 2.

Table 2. KKS - A study results of skills determining effective functioning in situations calling for assertiveness

Group of respondents	Low sten scores	Average sten scores	High sten scores
Women	12%	62%	26%
Men	12%	62%	26%

Source: Author.

Data presented in table 2 shows that both men and women scored averagely (4-7 sten scores) when it comes to skills determining effective functioning in situations calling for assertiveness (KKS-A). Average scores are dominant here (62%), followed by high (26%) and then low (12%). It can be concluded that teachers possess an average level of competencies allowing them to defend their rights and beliefs, as well as freely express their opinions and feelings. Competencies determining effective functioning in situations calling for assertiveness are essential to be successful in the educational process. In a school which is a place where the intensity of communication is so great, various errors

can be noticed – wrong perception of the surroundings and participators of communication, getting caught up in the excitement or accepting stereotypes. That is why the development and improvement of skills determining effective functioning in situations calling for assertiveness seem absolutely essential. Study results of skills determining effective functioning in situations demanding social exposure (KKS-ES) are presented in table 3.

Table 3. KKS – ES study results of skills determining effective functioning in situations demanding social exposure

Group of respondents	Low sten scores	Average sten scores	High sten scores
Women	19%	62%	19%
Men	24%	58%	18%

Source: Author.

As seen in chart 3, 62% of women demonstrated an average level of skills determining effective functioning in situations demanding social exposure, 19% low level and 19% high level. Men on the other hand, demonstrated an average level of skills determining effective functioning in situations demanding social exposure in 58% of cases, a low level in 24% of cases and a high level in 18% of cases. The obtained data proves that among both women and men average level (4-7 sten scores) of skills determining effective functioning in situations demanding social exposure (KKS-ES) is dominant. The study implies that teachers possess only mediocre level of abilities to influence others, negotiate or speak publicly.

Conclusion

The conducted study demonstrates that most teachers can be described as possessing only an average level of social competences set on the level of 4-7 sten scores. Such scores can suggest that teachers are mediocre in skills such as exerting influence, speaking publicly, negotiating, supporting their rights and believes in an unhampered way or expressing their feelings and opinions. Those skills are essential to be professionally successful and to avoid potential failures and difficulties in achieving individual goals in a social reality. What is more, the respondents have also demonstrated mediocre level of social competencies in terms of establishing close interpersonal contacts. Those results are surprising, for we live in times that provide us with multiple opportunities to develop and

improve such interpersonal skills as speaking in public, negotiations, openly expressing individual opinions and handling criticism. To conclude it should be clearly stated that those individuals who skilfully make use of social competences much more easily improve and succeed in all areas of life. That is why the attempts to develop and improve skills determining effective functioning in intimate situations, situations calling for assertiveness and situations demanding social exposure seem to be absolutely essential.

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