**Primary School Student Teachers’ and Teachers’ Satisfaction with Acquired Competences in Visual Arts Education**

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*Student teachers’ and teachers’ satisfaction with acquired competences during studies is one of the important indicators of the quality of study programs and, in addition to their values, points also to their shortcomings. The research goal was to detect those visual arts areas in which students and teachers do (not) feel competent enough to teach visual arts, as well as to examine the level of student teachers’ and teachers’ satisfaction with acquired competences in the area of visual arts education. The results could help in designing better curriculum frameworks for visual arts education at Faculties of Teacher Education in Croatia. They should meet the contemporary needs of teachers and students, with the aim of successful implementation and the achievement of learning outcomes in visual arts education.*

*Key words:* competences, satisfaction, student teachers, teachers, visual arts education

**1 Introduction**

Students’ and teachers’ satisfaction with competences acquired during studies represents one of the important elements to be taken into account when talking about the modernization of academic programs in the context of changing educational standards imposed by modern society. In the context of the Bologna changes in higher education in Croatia, the perspective of future teachers’ education is changing and developing in all areas, therefore in the area of visual arts education as well. The contemporary visual arts education puts numerous tasks in front of primary school teachers for which they are not fully prepared during their formal education. The existing subjects in the visual arts area at the Faculties of Teacher Education in Croatia are programmed to optimally satisfy the students’ qualifications. However, acquired competences in faculties represent only a basis for their further professional development. Teachers have to deepen their professional knowledge through acquiring new competences during lifelong learning (Hudson & Hudson, 2007). On the other hand, there is a gap that exists between the expectations of curriculum frameworks and the preparation in visual arts areas that can be provided by initial teacher education courses. The analysis of the teacher professional development in Croatia, made by the Agency for Education showed a number of deficiencies related to the initial education, as well as the in-service teacher training, indicating a need to supplement existing programs or create new ones (Kostović-Vranješ, 2015). A question arises of whether it is unrealistic to expect primary school teachers to teach effectively in all areas of the primary curriculum. It is also questionable to which measure future teachers can be capacitated for quality implementation of visual arts classes in the context of existing university programmes (Alter, Hays & O’Hara, 2009) i.e. to which measure and in which way the support for their further professional development in the area should be organised. Satisfaction with acquired competences is one of the important factors that determines how will the pre-service and in-service teachers feel during teaching visual arts classes.

Competence in a subject area can be a major predictor of confidence and efficacy related to teaching (Russel-Bowie, 2012). In designing and implementing curricula for visual arts education, the process of acquiring general pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodological competences has to be balanced with the acquisition of subject-specific competences. Subject-specific competences are related to the knowledge and mastery of specific visual arts areas, as well as the knowledge and mastering the specifics of the teaching process within visual arts classes.

**2 Aims and hypotheses**

The aim of the survey was to investigate the level of students’ and teachers’ satisfaction with acquired competences during studies related to the area of visual arts education. The aim was also to detect those areas in which the students and teachers do (not) feel competent enough for teaching visual arts classes. With regard to the research aims, the following hypotheses were formed:

H1: There will be no statistically significant difference between the students and teachers in the level of satisfaction with acquired competences during studies related to the area of visual arts education.

H2: There will be no statistically significant difference between the students’ and teachers’ opinions about the areas in visual arts education in which students and teachers would like to acquire additional knowledge and skills.

H3: There will be no statistically significant difference between the students’ and teachers’ perception of influence of their preferences for visual arts on their motivation to mastering the visual arts contents, i.e. on teaching visual arts classes.

**3 Methods**

3.1 Participants

231 students participated in the research. These participants were student-teachers of the fourth and fifth year at the Faculties of Teacher Education in Zagreb, Petrinja, Čakovec and Rijeka (hereinafter: students). Also, 143 in-service primary school teachers participated in the research (hereinafter: teachers). They were employed in the aforementioned cities and in the Istria County. The participants were randomly selected. The average age of the teachers was 45.

3.2 Data collection procedures and analysis

Two questionnaires were designed for the purpose of the research – one for the students of the Faculties of Teacher Education, and one for the primary school teachers. They contained close-ended questions. The research is based on the quantitative research paradigm. The data obtained by the questionnaires were processed at the level of descriptive and inferential statistics. The normality of the results distribution was tested by Kolmogorov Smirnov (KS) test. Due to abnormalities in the results distribution, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used for further statistical analysis. Hypotheses are verified by using of Mann Whitney U test and Fisher’s exact test (two-way test).

**4 Results and discussion**

*Table 1:* The perception of students’ and teachers’ satisfaction with acquired competences during studies related to the area of visual arts education

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | f | f% |
| students | teachers | students | teachers |
| I am not satisfied | 8 | 11 | 3,5 | 7,7 |
| I am satisfied to a lesser extent | 26 | 27 | 11,3 | 18,9 |
| I am partially satisfied | 97 | 47 | 42,0 | 32,9 |
| I am satisfied to a greater extent | 80 | 52 | 34,6 | 36,4 |
| I am completely satisfied | 20 | 6 | 8,7 | 4,2 |

Analysis of the results displayed in Table 1 shows that a little more than three quarters of the students and teachers are satisfied partly or in greater extent with the acquired competences related to the visual arts education. One dozen students and almost one fifth of teachers are satisfied to a lesser extent, while only 3.5 % of students and 7.7 % of teachers are not satisfied with the acquired knowledge in the area of visual arts education. A higher percentage of dissatisfied or less satisfied teachers can be explained as a consequence of changes in Croatia’s educational politics. Before the implementation of Bologna Process, university teacher studies in the Republic of Croatia lasted two, and then four years. After the Bologna changes, university teacher studies last five years. Consequently, the quality of study programs has been also improved. Today, the visual arts education, as a part of the present study programs at Faculties of Teacher Education in Croatia, is sufficiently incorporated in relation to the other education areas, although the question arises, whether the amount of teaching hours meet the real students’ needs.

*Table 2:* The areas in which students and teachers would like to acquire additional knowledge and skills, and to which, related to their opinion, should be paid more attention during studies

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | f | f% |
| students | teachers | students | teachers |
| Nothing is necessary to change | 7 | 3 | 3,0 | 2,1 |
| Subject-specific contents (theory of visual arts, visual arts history...) | 50 | 20 | 21,6 | 14,0 |
| Use of art techniques and creative expression (drawing, painting, modelling…) | 118 | 108 | 51,1 | 75,5 |
| development of aesthetic sensibility and abilities for analysis of artworks and children’s works | 117 | 76 | 50,6 | 53,1 |
| specificities of didactic-methodical procedures in organising and implementing visual arts classes | 114 | 62 | 49,4 | 43,4 |
| connecting visual arts content to other areas | 69 | 18 | 29,9 | 12,6 |

In this question the participants could choose more than one answer offered. Analysis of the results shows that the largest number of participants from both groups - more than half of the students and even three quarters of the teachers – have an opinion that the existing study programs should be more based on practical artistic expression and learning about the art techniques and materials. This statement testifies to students’ and teachers’ feeling of insufficient competence in the area of visual arts; it also indirectly testifies about insufficient number of courses aimed at acquiring these skills and abilities throughout their initial education. On the other hand, this information supports the fact that teachers prefer interactive, cooperative ways of work in which they directly and practically participate, especially when it comes to some kind of creative expression (Garvis, 2009). One half of the students and more than one half of the teachers want to acquire additional knowledge and skills linked to aesthetic sensibility development and analysis of artworks and children’s works. This segment of visual arts classes is usually rather neglected in practice, although it should be developed as a prerequisite for individual acceptance and internalisation of the artworks (Duh, 2016). The reasons for that can be found in the lack of time for processing teaching content (there are only 35 teaching hours per year provided for visual arts classes by national curriculum in Croatia), but also in insufficient teachers’ competence in this field. Also, almost one half of the students and the teachers would like to acquire additional knowledge and skills about the specificities of didactic-methodical procedures of organising and implementing the teaching contents in visual arts classes. The result is understandable, considering that one of the ongoing problems related to teacher education is lack of time provided for teaching practice and engaging in real school conditions. The stated fact also testifies to teachers’ awareness about the importance of applying appropriate and specific teaching strategies and methods in realising learning goals. On the other hand, teachers are confronted with the difficult task to translate abstract new curriculum principles into a meaningful sequence of authentic learning tasks (Hoogveld, Paas & Jochems, 2005), which is also one of the most difficult aspects of designing programs for further teachers’ professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2006). One fifth of students and a slightly smaller number of teachers (14 %) think that more time should be paid to the acquisition of knowledge in the subject-specific content (visual arts theory, visual arts history ...). The assumption is that the lesser percentage of the participants who chose this statement means that they consider the given areas to be less important for successful teaching visual arts classes. Almost one third (29.9 %) of students and only 12.6 % of teachers would like to find out more about the possibilities to connect visual arts content with other subjects' contents. Research has shown that most teachers use a method of linking visual arts contents with other subject's contents very often (Tomljenović, 2016). This fact leads to the confirmation of highly interdisciplinary nature of visual arts classes, that are the in-service teachers aware of. A very small percentage of students (3 %) and teachers (2.1 %) thinks that study programs do not need to modify or supplement.

*Table 3:* The students' and teachers' perception of influence of their preferences for visual arts on their motivation to mastering the visual arts contents, i.e. on teaching visual arts classes

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | f | f% |
| students | teachers | students | teachers |
| It does not affect | 44 | 31 | 19,0 | 21,7 |
| It affects to a small degree | 57 | 15 | 24,7 | 10,5 |
| It affects partially | 60 | 41 | 26,0 | 28,7 |
| It affects to a greater extent | 55 | 41 | 23,8 | 28,7 |
| It affects highly | 15 | 15 | 6,5 | 10,5 |

Analysis of the results shown in Table 3 demonstrates that the personal preferences for visual arts affect partially or to a greater extent to the motivation in mastering the educational content in the field of visual arts on more than one half of participants in both groups. The extreme effect of the mentioned tendency is present by one tenth of the teachers and slightly less percentage (6.5 %) of students, while it does not affect at all on 19 % of students and 21,7 % of teachers. This data is very important because it points to the importance of the previously formed attitudes or prejudices, which may hinder the creation of new concepts, knowledge and skills. The prejudice about existence of a talent for artistic expression as a condition for successful teaching visual arts classes is among students often present. On the other hand, this attitude, if accompanied by the sense of insufficient self-efficacy in the area of visual arts, can bring to the neglecting of teaching visual arts contents in primary schools (Garvis, 2009).

*Table 4:* Results of the descriptive statistics and the Mann-Whitney U test comparing the students' and teachers' satisfaction with acquired competences during studies, related to the area of visual arts education

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | groups | N | descriptive statistics | Mann-Whitney U test |
| Me | M | SD | Mrank | Sumrank | U | Z | P |
| V3V7\* | students | 231 | 3,37 | 3,34 | 0,060 | 195,34 | 45122,50 | 14706,500 | -1,882 | 0,060 |
| teachers | 143 | 3,49 | 3,43 | 0,057 | 174,84 | 25002,50 |

*p < 0,05; \*Variables include the following claims: not satisfied; satisfied to a lesser extent; partially satisfied; saisfied to a greater extent, completely satisfied*

Analysis of the results shown in Table 4 demonstrated that there is no statistically significant difference between the students' and teachers' satisfaction with acquired competences during studies, related to the area of visual arts education *Hypothesis H1 is therefore confirmed.*

Educational practice shows that teachers do not possess sufficient visual arts knowledge and skills (Tomljenović & Novaković, 2014). In-service teachers explain it by deficiencies in the initial education and insufficient professional trainings (Kostović-Vranješ, 2015). If these skills are not developed during initial education and teacher training, it can lead to weak teacher self-efficacy beliefs towards visual arts education. Moreover, without supportive teacher education, primary school teachers will develop a lack of confidence, motivation and knowledge towards the arts (Henessy, Rolfe, & Chedoy, 2001; Russell-Bowie, 2004). This fact leads to the conclusion that teacher education should not be overly directed towards transferring expert content, but more towards gaining experience tied to successful implementation of modern teaching concepts which change teachers' beliefs and standpoints (Guskey, 2002).

The Fischer's exact test was used to evaluate differences in mean ratings between students and teachers, according to their opinions in which areas they would like to acquire additional knowledge and skills. The results show that there are no statistically significant difference between students and teachers in four of the six variables tested: *I don't want to gain additional knowledge,* p=0,747; *subject-specific knowledge and skills,* p=0,076; *development of aesthetic sensibility and abilities for analysis of artworks and children's works,* p=0,201; *specificities of didactic-methodical procedures in organising and implementing visual arts contents*, p=0,523. There is statistically significant difference between students and teachers in the variable: *use of art techniques and creative expression,* p<0,001. There are more teachers (75,5 %), who would like to gain the additional knowledge and skills in the mentioned area than students (51,1 %). There is also statistically significant difference between students and teachers in the variable: *connecting visual arts content to other areas*, p<0,001. There are more students (29,9 %), who would like to gain the additional knowledge and skills in the mentioned area than teachers (12,6 %). *Hypothesis H2 is therefore partially confirmed.*

A greater percentage of teachers who would like to gain the additional knowledge and skills in the area of the use of art techniques and creative expression can be explained by the fact that the need for this kind of practical skills could have arisen by in-service teachers during the practical activities in visual arts classes. It is also possible that the students during studies do not became completely aware of the importance of possessing this kind of competences. The third conclusion is that contemporary study programs take more attention to achieve these competences by students than in earlier years. A greater percentage of students who would like to gain the additional knowledge and skills in the area of connecting visual arts content to other areas testifies to students’ awareness about the need for interdisciplinary and integrative approach to teaching and learning. On the other hand, small percentage of teachers with this answer shows that most teachers often apply correlation of visual arts contents to contents from other subjects (Tomljenović, 2016).

*Table 5:*  Results of the descriptive statistics and the Mann-Whitney U test comparing the students' and teachers' perception of influence of their preferences for visual arts on their motivation to mastering the visual arts contents, i.e. on teaching visual arts classes

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | groups | N | descriptive statistics | Mann-Whitney U test |
| Me | M | SD | Mrank | Sumrank | U | Z | P |
| V3V10\* | students | 231 | 2,74 | 2,74 | 0,079 | 180,12 | 41607,50 | 14811,500 | -1,724 | 0,085 |
| teachers | 143 | 3,12 | 3,12 | 1,299 | 199,42 | 28517,50 |

*p < 0,05*

Analysis of the results shown in Table 5 demonstrated that there is no statistically significant difference between students' and teachers' perception of influence of their preferences for the visual arts on their motivation to mastering the visual arts contents, i.e. on teaching visual arts classes. *Hypothesis H3 is therefore confirmed.*

These results support the findings of other studies that have been done about the influence of teachers’ beliefs and standpoints on the school subject visual arts (Eisner, 2002; Garvis, 2009; Hudson & Hudson 2007; Klopper, 2015). They have shown that the aforementioned problem is amongst the most present in the teaching practice and it directly influences the efficiency of the teaching process. Garvis (2009) also states that insufficiently developed knowledge and abilities in the course of formal education can leave teachers feeling less assured of their own efficiency which consequently leads to low self-esteem and lack of confidence and motivation for teaching visual arts. This is why the initial education, as well as further professional development related to visual arts teaching should primarily promote a sense of success and a positive attitude towards visual arts activities and the subject itself and it should also develop teachers' self-esteem (Oreck, 2004; Andrews, 2012).

**5 Conclusion**

Student teachers’ and teachers’ satisfaction with acquired competences during studies is one of the important indicators of the quality of study programs and, in addition to their values, points also to their shortcomings. Arts education research over the years have shown that pre-service teachers', as well as the in-service teachers' lack of confidence in their own artistic ability and their ability to teach visual arts may contribute to limited teaching and learning of arts education within the classroom (Garvis, 2009; Russel-Bowie, 2012). This study has shown that most participants are satisfied partially or in greater extent with their initial education in the area of visual arts, but they also feel the need for the acquisition of additional knowledge and skills in the mentioned area. The study has also proved that effective study programs, as well as the further teacher training should lead to quality changes in teachers' way of thinking, standpoints and work, which is the principal goal of teacher professional development. In this context students' and teacher' satisfaction should be a concern for all those who are engaged with educational policy in order to adapt policy decisions to the real practice i.e. to create effective study programs.

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