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## Diagnosis of Professional Competencies and Training Needs of Preschool and Early School Education Teachers

### KEYWORDS:

child, student,  
teachers' professional  
competences,  
kindergarten,  
primary school

### ABSTRACT

Among many factors that influence the quality and effectiveness of the work of a school, kindergarten or another educational institution, a teacher and his/her professional competences are very important. At the time when the Polish educational system is undergoing another reform, both in terms of structure and curriculum, the preparation of teachers to implement it, especially in terms of professional competences, seems to be of key significance. The quality of teachers' work, their substantial preparation, is not only crucial for the proper implementation of reforms – which seems to be particularly important for the authors of the reforms – but for the main subject of educational actions, i. e. the child and its general development. Effective teaching in the kindergarten and at the first level of education shall make it possible for the students to achieve success at the further stages of education. That is why, it seems right to take up partial research among kindergarten and early education teachers in order to diagnose, on the basis of their self-assessment, professional competences,

as well as the needs and expectations in terms of professional improvement. That main objective was fulfilled due to the research carried out among the teachers working in kindergartens and classes I-III of primary schools from the Biała Podlaska region and city, in the Lublin voivodeship. The method of a diagnostic survey with the use of a questionnaire was applied in the research. The research results provided interesting information on the teachers' self-assessment of their own competences on a three-grade scale. It is worth mentioning that most teachers situate their competences at the second, i. e. medium level. Also, the research made it possible to collect and describe the scale of the teachers' needs and expectations in terms of professional improvement, which influences both their own development and the effective work with children.

## Introduction

The Polish educational system is undergoing another stage of reforms, both structural and those related to the curriculum. One of the most important elements of each change, both in kindergartens and at schools, is preparing teachers, students and parents for the change. Teachers, although they know that the system of education, due to the civilisation and scientific progress, undergoes a permanent and natural change, may be a bit tired with the amount of reforms and transformations in the Polish educational institutions. In the light of the educational law, mainly the act called the Teacher's Charter, comparing with other professions, teachers' professional stability is guaranteed, but the obligations and requirements that are placed in front of them are very difficult (Strykowski, Strykowska, Pielachowski 2003; Czaja-Chudyba, Muchacka 2016). The regulations concerning the qualifications of teachers are very strict, both in terms of education and in terms of professional readiness and motivation. The desired features of a teacher are also something that is particularly taken into account. It is believed that the teacher's main obligation is to create good conditions for the students' self-fulfilment and self-improvement, and related detailed tasks include stimulating their motivation as the most important developmental driving force, stimulating their emotions, curiousness, aspirations and creativity, helping them discover the world of values, shaping their ability to gain knowledge on their own. The evolution of a teacher's position in the school system should aim at changing the role of the one who directs, leads and manages educational tasks to the one who fulfils one's own pedagogical concepts in a way that supports and facilitates the student's development (Feiner, Went 1997). Such a conclusion concerning the features desired in the teacher's profession is, of course, still valid, but such postulates have been repeated for almost thirty years, i. e. since the time of the political system

change and the first reform of the educational system in the democratic Poland. Does it mean that the expectations related to the role, function and tasks of a modern teacher have been just postulates for that whole period of time? It is difficult to answer that question. School, as a social institution, and students, as the social environment of the school, undergo a constant change due to such factors as rapid social and civilization changes. Thus, the path of professional development followed by the Polish teachers is not only very dynamic, but its quality is new. Today, too, active teachers undergo an important change.

Starting from 2017, teachers have been implementing the assumptions of the newest reform at all levels of schooling. At the same time, new regulations concerning the path of professional development<sup>1</sup> were issued for teachers employed in the Polish public schools. The time from the lowest level of teaching career, i. e. a trainee teacher, to the highest – a certified teacher, was to be extended by five years.<sup>2</sup> Also, the requirements to be met in order to get a higher career level were made higher, as such a promotion was to depend on the teacher's work annual assessment. Also, it is worth mentioning that both sociological and pedagogical research shows that teachers are a professional group that trains and improves itself in a very intense manner (see Czerepaniak-Walczak 2013; Wach-Kąkolewicz 2013). Teachers are interested in courses organized in teacher development centres and at universities, as well as in postgraduate studies and other forms of training. Also, pedagogues use the European Union projects due to which teachers improve their qualifications and gain new professional competences. However, apart from the EU projects, teachers often have to pay for such courses and training sessions using their own funds.

The changes that are taking place in schooling are carried out along with the change in educating teachers. The suggested changes are radical, but teachers have accepted them in a quite positive manner. The reform of universities in educating teachers is mainly focused on increasing the importance of the profession that cannot be achieved without the return to the high quality of educating future teachers. On the basis of this assumption, all pedagogical studies educating future teachers are to last five years, and the preparation for the job of a kindergarten teacher and early school education is to be carried out only at 5-year pedagogical studies finished with a master's degree.

The discussion on the concepts or models of educating future teachers has been carried out both among the practitioners and theoreticians of this issue for a very long time now. Such a debate is accompanied by practical postulates of the reform of

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 26 July 2018 concerning teachers' career levels, *Journal of Laws* 2018, item 1574.

<sup>2</sup> After the strikes of teachers in September 2019, the previous regulation was restored (editors' note).

universities in the segment of educating future teachers. At the moment, the discussion is changing into the implementation of changes under the new law concerning science and universities called Act 2.0 of 20<sup>th</sup> July 2018. According to this act, significant changes in terms of the system and curriculum are implemented at the universities which educate future teachers.<sup>3</sup> Particularly important changes are related to teaching kindergarten teachers and early school teachers. The changes are much deeper than just the obligation to implement uniform, 5-year master's studies preparing teachers to work in these specializations.

The works on the directions of changes had been carried out in the ministry of science since at least 2017, when the Team of Experts at the Minister of Science and Higher Education was appointed. In 2018, the Team suggested a new model of educating kindergarten teachers and early school teachers. In general, the graduate who completed such studies was described in the following areas:

1. Knowledge and skills – as a reflective practitioner, expert in supporting the child's development and erudite who has an interdisciplinary and interiorized knowledge of the world;
2. Shaping relations with themselves and with others – as an acquiescent carer, a person with a positive attitude towards new experiences, someone who is aware of one's interests and honest.

The suggested new model also includes a detailed suggestion of new educational results, along with the new suggestion of education in the specializations – kindergarten and early school pedagogy. While this article was being written, the new educational results have not yet been published in the form of a formal-legal paper. There is no doubt that universities which prepare students for working as teachers are facing new educational challenges. It will take a few years to determine whether such changes will actually lead to higher quality education of teachers. In the context of the discussed changes and social debates on the quality of educating teachers, the situation of teachers who already work seems not to be very good. On the one hand, they may accept critical opinions *ad personam* since they obtained their qualifications in this, strongly criticized, system of education. On the other hand, frequent implementation of educational reforms forces teachers to be constantly ready for changes, both in terms of professional competences and new organizational tasks that often limit the teacher's fuller intellectual development. It is worth mentioning that the postulate for interdisciplinarity included in the new model of educating teachers has been, in practice, implemented for many years, as – due to frequent reforms – they extend their qualifications by the preparation for teaching new subjects in order not to lose the job. Also, teachers'

<sup>3</sup> The Act on Universities and Science of 20th July 2018, Dz. U. 2018, item 1668.

financial situation has not been satisfactory for a long time, which may be the reason why they improve their competences – other than those required formally.

The authors of changes in the system of educating teachers have assumed that the quality of education at the first, elementary level (starting from the kindergarten) is the key to future successes or the source of failures for both a unit and large social groups. Since this conclusion is so obvious and known to all the “actors” of the educational scene, it seems that we should attempt to carry out and verify the self-evaluation of teachers, who have been working with kindergarten and early school children for many years, in terms of their professional competences.

Here we should pay special attention to the concept of teacher competences. In pedagogical literature, we can find different definitions of the concept because teacher competences are a structure consisting of teachers’ skills, knowledge, dispositions and attitudes necessary for the fulfillment of tasks resulting from a particular educational competence.

One of the most popular meanings of the term is that competences are “the ability and readiness to perform tasks at a particular level” (Strykowski 2005) or “the acquired skill to do things well; developed skills necessary for dealing with problems” (Taraszkiwicz 2001). The best definition of competences is that of Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak who says that they include “a particular property expressed in demonstrating, at the level established by social standards, the ability to behave properly and take responsibility for such behaviour” (Czerepaniak-Walczak 1999).

While discussing teacher competences, we can distinguish their four kinds or areas. The most popular division includes: substantial competences, didactic-methodological competences and upbringing competences (Wach-Kąkolewicz 2013). The common idea of competences is used in two meanings: first, competences are identified with qualifications; second, the term ‘competences’ means the scope of powers. In the research part, the analysis included practical competences and skills of teachers, who work in selected kindergartens and primary schools, in the context of performing the teacher’s job in an effective manner.

Taking into account the briefly described issue related to educating teachers and their practical professional competences, it was necessary to carry out pedagogical research the main objective of which was to know the self-evaluation of kindergarten and early school teachers related to their key professional competences and to specify their needs in terms of professional improvement. The following detailed objectives were added to that main goal:

1. On the basis of the self-evaluation of the analysed group of teachers we wish to specify their level of diagnostic, organisational, methodological and IT competences.

2. We wish to describe the qualifications of teachers working in the kindergarten and in classes I-III of the primary school.
3. We wish to recognise the support teachers expect from various organs and institutions in their further professional development.

## The methodological assumptions of the research

Taking into account the main objective and detailed objectives, the research was carried out in selected kindergartens and schools in the region and city of Biała Podlaska, in the Lublin voivodeship. It was carried out from September to December 2018. Only volunteer teachers from the educational institutions located in that area took part in the research.

### Research methods, techniques and tools

In the analysis of the competences of kindergarten and early education teachers, we used the method of a diagnostic survey and questionnaire. The research tool was the questionnaire prepared by the Mazovian Team in charge of the Systemic Research on the Support of the Professional Improvement of Teachers. The tool was used to analyse the self-evaluation of teacher competences and to learn about their needs in terms of further development. Such a questionnaire, in the interactive version, consisted of 25 questions (mostly closed-ended ones) grouped according to the analysed teacher competences. In the first part of the survey, diagnostic competences were enumerated; in the second one – organisational competences, and in the fourth one – competences related to the use of IT and communication technologies. The above mentioned survey also included open-ended questions aimed at diagnosing the needs and expectations of teachers in terms of professional improvement. The respondents assessed the suggested tool as extensive and very detailed. It was compliant with the intention of the authors of the diagnosis who decided to obtain as much information as possible on planning the support and improvement of kindergarten and early education teachers.

### Research participants

110 teachers took part in the research. Most of them came from the city of Biała Podlaska – they constituted 67% of the analysed group; and 32% were teachers working in a village in the Biała Podlaska region. The exact number of teachers working in those kindergartens and primary schools was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research participants and their place of work

Early education teachers		Kindergarten teachers			
		who work with kindergarten groups		who work in classes "0"	
N	%	N	%	N	%
40	36,4	40	36,4	20	27,2

Source: own research.

Due to the length of work, the largest group included the teachers who have worked for more than 20 years – 48%. The second group included the teachers who have worked for 11 to 19 years – 32%, and the smallest group included the teachers who have worked for 1 to 10 years – 20%. According to the above data, most respondents were experienced teachers. Only women took part in the research.

## Research results

While describing the data from the surveys, first the information on the professional qualifications of kindergarten and early education teachers was given. Teachers' professional qualifications were specified with the use of three indicators: the level of education, the career degree and the register of additional qualifications and forms of improvement. The data indicates that kindergarten and early education teachers are a professional group with a high level of qualifications. Most of them have a master's degree – 82%; only 18% of the respondents graduated from the first level studies. The majority of the teachers are certified or nominated teachers. Detailed data of the teachers, taking into account the degree of professional career, is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The degree of career in the analysed group of teachers

Educational institution	Trainee teacher	Contract teacher	Nominated teacher	Certified teacher
Kindergarten	5%	8%	10%	23%
Primary school	2%	5%	15%	32%
Total	7%	13%	25%	55%

Source: own research.

The data presented in table 2 shows that, both in the kindergarten and in the primary school, the largest group included certified teachers, and the smallest group – trainee teachers. And, comparing with the primary schools, there were more trainee teachers and contract teachers working in kindergartens.

While analysing the data related to additional qualifications in the group of the analysed teachers, we noticed that almost all the teachers – apart from basic qualifications related to their specialisation – have additional qualifications that make it possible for them to work with children with special educational needs. Such additional qualifications included post-graduate studies in speech therapy, studies or courses in pedagogical therapy, corrective exercises, or sensory integration. Some teachers graduated from the 1<sup>st</sup> level studies in Polish, English, Maths, Art, IT, or general pedagogy. Also, the respondents mentioned postgraduate studies in management in education, pedagogy in social and educational work, and library science.

As we have already mentioned, the self-evaluation of teacher competences was divided into four groups. Each of them was evaluated at three levels of professional development. It is worth mentioning that, in the above mentioned research tool, while describing the levels, the typology suggested by Tom Boydell and Malcolm Leary in the publication: *Identification of Training Needs* (2006), was used. These authors distinguish three levels of professional development:

Level 1. Implementation – taking the professional role (I am learning, I am trying to use).

Level 2. Improvement – efficient use of knowledge and practised skills.

Level 3. Introducing innovations – preparing new, better ways of working.

I. Self-evaluation of the diagnostic competences of kindergarten and early school teachers – research results.

On the basis of the analysis of the teachers' diagnostic competences, we have to conclude that most of them are able to meet the requirements related to the obligation of diagnosing children, especially as for collecting and analysing information about them. The respondents' weaker point is using the collected information to formulate conclusions and recommendations for further work with children. Detailed results are shown in table 3.



Table 3. Diagnostic competences of the analysed group of teachers

No.	Analysed skills at the level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
1.	<b>The ability to recognise</b>				
	– children’s cognitive functions – motor functions – speech development – mental development – the child’s system of values – family environment – intellectual development	25%	75%	–	100%
	– emotional development – social development – readiness to learn to read and write – readiness to learn Maths	10%	77%	13%	100%
2.	<b>The ability to collect information with the use of</b>				
	– techniques of sociometry	10%	90%	–	100%
	– observation of a particular child – observation of the group – group interview with children – group interview with parents – analysis of the child’s works	45%	55%	–	100%
	– information with the use of an individual interview with the child and parent – survey – analysis of test results	30%	65%	5%	100%
3.	<b>Methodological skills related to</b>				
	– creating tools for diagnosis – formulating conclusions from the diagnosis – formulating recommendations for further work – communicating the result of the diagnosis	20%	75%	5%	100%
	– analysis of the collected data – data interpretation	25%	72%	3%	100%

No.	Analysed skills at the level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
4.	<b>The ability to use the information for</b>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- specifying developmental deficiencies</li> <li>- identifying the reasons for the problems with learning</li> <li>- solving conflicts with parents</li> <li>- preparing an individual plan of working with the child</li> </ul>	47%	53%	–	100%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- specifying developmental deficiencies</li> <li>- identifying problems with learning</li> </ul>	56%	44%	–	100%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- solving conflicts in the group</li> <li>- preparing a plan of working with the group</li> <li>- preparing an individual plan of working with the child</li> </ul>	10%	80%	10%	100%

Source: own research.

While analysing the percentage indicators at particular levels, it was noted that most teachers refer their diagnostic competences to level 2. The group mainly includes certified and nominated teachers with a long experience in teaching (44%-90%). The smallest amount of people specified their diagnostic competences as adequate for level three, i. e. the lowest one. They were certified teachers with additional qualifications, e.g. in speech therapy, sensory integration, pedagogical therapy, which, indubitably, make it easier for them to carry out the diagnosis, interpret its results and formulate conclusions.

Analysing the teachers' replies related to the need for improvement in diagnostic competences, we noted that teachers expect training in diagnosing the children's school readiness, preparing their own sheets for the child's initial evaluation, and the ability to collect information.

## II. Self-evaluation of methodical competences of kindergarten and early education teachers – research results

The results of the analysis of methodical competences is the teachers' strong point, because almost 68-78% of the respondents specified that they are at level 2; 30% – at level three. In table 4 we presented detailed percentage indicators related to methodical competences in the analysed group of teachers.

Table 4. Methodical competences in the analysed group of teachers

No.	Analysed skills at the level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
1.	<b>Methodical skills in</b>				
	–preparing and modifying the curriculum	18%	78%	4%	100%
	–operationalization of educational objectives –analysis of the educational content –differentiating the levels of requirements –fulfilment of the didactic process with the use of selected methods –selection of the curriculum	7%	73%	20%	100%
	–selecting and using didactic resources –selecting methods of teaching	2%	68%	30%	100%

Source: own research.

Most respondents confirm their methodical competences at the level 2 and 3, skilfully select and use didactic methods and means, or prepare their own, better ways and methodical solutions. Such a high level of the above mentioned skills may make it easier for the teachers to effectively educate children in kindergartens and early school.

However, as many as 68-78% teachers declared that their methodical competences are at level 2, which may mean that even certified teachers do not evaluate their competences at the highest level. Teachers with a short experience in teaching are the most effective in using the ability to operationalize the educational goals, analyse the educational content, fulfil the didactic process with the use of selected methods, choose the didactic resources and use them in working with children. It is worth mentioning that some teachers (also those with a long experience in teaching) only identify themselves with the first level of methodical competences (“I am learning,” “I am trying to use”) as for preparing and modifying the curriculum.

In terms of the need for professional improvement, the majority of teachers indicated the need to participate in workshops and courses in order to meet the innovative methods of working with children and students. The suggestions show that kindergarten and early education teachers are open to methodical novelties and willing to improve their qualifications.

### III. Self-evaluation of organisational competences of kindergarten and early education teachers – research results.

Organisational competences of teachers were referred to the ability to organise particular forms of work. More than 60% teachers declared that they can effectively

(level 2) organise different forms of work of the school/kindergarten (table 5). From 13% to 20% teachers specified their organisational competences at level three. Unfortunately, there were also some teachers (2-22%) who evaluated their competences to be at level 1.

Table 5. Organisational competences of the analysed group of teachers

No.	Analysed skills at the level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
1.	<b>Efficiency in the organisation of</b>				
	– educational projects – sport competitions – environmental events	22%	78%	–	100%
	– a team/group/class – trips, contests, sport competitions – exhibitions/presentations of works – organisational and informative meetings with parents	14%	73%	13%	100%
	– obligatory classes/lessons – kindergarten/school ceremonies – clubs	2%	78%	20%	100%

Source: own research.

Teachers (especially certified and nominated ones) are able to effectively use the time assigned for lessons and classes, organize obligatory and voluntary classes, organize competitions and events, as well as integration meetings. They evaluate themselves as good organizers of kindergarten and early school life and they do not require help in the organization of different events and celebrations. We can say that the level of such teacher competences increases as they gain experience in teaching. It is confirmed by the research carried out by professor Henryka Kwiatkowska (Kwiatkowska 2000; 2008).<sup>4</sup> The surveyed teachers felt the least competent in organising educational projects, sport competitions and events with the participation of the local community (22%).

#### IV. Self-evaluation of the competences with the use of IT-communication competences of kindergarten and early education teachers – research results

Most kindergarten and early education teachers evaluate their competences related to the use of IT-communication technology as referring to level 2. It is confirmed by a large number of skills they are learning and trying to use in pedagogical practice.

<sup>4</sup> It is confirmed by the research on teacher competences carried out by prof. Henryka Kwiatkowska from the Warsaw University.

Table 6. Teacher competences related to the use of IT-communication technologies

No.	Analysed skills at the level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
1.	<b>Skills related to the use of IT-communication technologies (ITC)</b>				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–the knowledge of safe work with the computer and using the internet during the classes</li> <li>–using popular IT programmes (text editor, excel, power point)</li> <li>–using e-mails and communicators (e.g. Skype)</li> <li>–planning and choosing the proper methods of working with children with the use of ITC</li> <li>–the use of the Moodle platform for remote learning</li> <li>–using presentation tools (interactive boards, multimedia projectors)</li> </ul>	69%	31%	–	100%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–using the internet resources (the knowledge of websites for teachers, searching for and downloading information)</li> <li>–using word, excel, power point</li> <li>–using e-mails and communicators (e.g. Skype)</li> </ul>	24%	76%	–	100%
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–using the internet resources (the knowledge of websites for teachers, searching for and downloading information)</li> <li>–the knowledge of the safety of working with children on the computer</li> </ul>	24%	65%	11%	100%

Source: own research.

We should pay attention to the lack of indications on level three, which may mean that most teachers do not often use the skills related to the use of the Moodle remote learning platform.

Another open-ended question placed under the table of competences in the questionnaire was related to the obtainment of information on the accessibility of the internet and computer room in the building. Almost all teachers (90%) admit that a computer with internet is available for them at school or in the kindergarten, e.g. in the teachers' room, computer room or library. Most teachers use teacher websites for self-education. They use such platforms to exchange information and experience with

other teachers, to prepare lessons on the basis of the materials found in the internet, to search for information in encyclopaedias and internet dictionaries, to look for educational novelties, to order methodical books, to find didactic materials and aids, to create functional papers (e.g. magazines, invitations), to co-create websites, or to use Skype to communicate with partner schools or kindergartens.

The data obtained during the research may seem impressive, but 10% teachers rarely or never use IT-communication technologies. They justify it with organisational difficulties (e.g. not enough computers, the inability to use the computer room any time, or the inability to use the computer room without its supervisor), or technical difficulties (e.g. old, damaged and/or incomplete equipment or the lack of it in several cases; insufficient number of rooms in the building).

The last question in the questionnaire was related to kindergarten and early education teachers' expectations concerning their further professional development. The teachers were asked to describe their needs and expected support in the development of their competences the use of which is necessary in their didactic and educational work. Their answers were grouped, but the percentage indicators were not calculated because the teachers could enumerate as many expectations as they wished, and because most teachers defined similar needs and expectations.

The answer to that question was presented in the form of a list taking into account four groups of needs related to extending one's own professional competences.

#### 1. Expectations related to the improvement of diagnostics competences.

The teachers emphasize that pedagogical diagnosis of children is necessary, also due to the valid regulations of the educational law<sup>5</sup>. Proper diagnosis makes it possible for teachers to identify the child's developmental deficits and to properly adjust working with them. Thus, it facilitates the appropriate organisation of the didactic-educational process and giving all students equal chances. Although a lot of the analysed teachers evaluated their diagnostic competences as high, they still feel the need for further development. Here is what they expect:

- intensifying the cooperation with psychological-pedagogical counseling offices in the form of consultations and shared diagnoses in a kindergarten/school;
- training sessions during teachers' meetings on the improvement on diagnostic skills, carried out by people with rich practical experience in the fulfillment of this task;

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<sup>5</sup> The regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 concerning the core curriculum in kindergartens and primary schools, including the students with moderate or significant intellectual disability; in 1<sup>st</sup> level vocational schools; in special schools preparing students for work; and in postsecondary schools, Journal of Laws 2017, item 356.

- training sessions related to the ability to find and use standardized tools for diagnostics analyses, as there are a lot of such tools, but their quality is not always good.

Also, the respondents emphasized the fact that they are willing to gain diagnostic skills and experiences, but (especially in villages) it is hard to contact the specialists (there are no speech therapists, psychologists, who could support teachers in the process of diagnosing the students' competences and skills).

## 2. Expectations related to methodical support.

In this field, the analysed teachers expect support from institutions and teacher support centres at the local, regional and national level. The most desirable support refers to:

- training in the ability to create individual curricula, which especially refers to teachers with short working experience;
- learning new teaching methods within the school's inner improvement of teachers;
- the ability to use different forms of improvement, offered by teacher support centres and universities, which are focused on particular educational and preventive problems, as well as methodical novelties (especially those which are free of charge);
- the support of a methodical advisor in the form of individual and group consultations, training sessions and direct support at school;
- the return to colleague lessons and self-education teams consisting of teachers from different schools organised in the communes or poviats;
- extending the offer of professional improvement by scientific conferences and symposia related to the methods of teaching, organised by universities or teacher support centres.

## 3. Organisational support necessary for the fulfilment of kindergarten/early education objectives.

The teachers' suggestions concerning organisational competences were divided into two groups. In one of them, the needs related to the institution's material and didactic resources were presented, and in the second group individual needs, described as the teacher's "individual space" were included.

### a) the area related to the material and didactic resources:

- the necessity to modernise and redecorate the existing school resources, especially gyms, playgrounds and common rooms;
- equipping schools and kindergartens with modern didactic aids and computers (such postulates mainly came from the teachers working in villages);
- substantive help in the obtainment of grants and financial support from outside the budget (postulates of rural environments).

- b) the area related to the teacher's "individual space:"
- full financing of different forms of teacher improvement;
  - easy access to IT-communication technologies in the institution;
  - "legibility of the regulations of the educational law;"
  - making it possible for different schools/kindergartens to exchange information and experiences;
  - the ability to use the support of a speech therapist/psychologist;
  - support from the supervising body and from the pedagogical institution verifying the work of the school/kindergarten,
  - supporting the teacher's work by the director of the kindergarten or school – it is interesting that a lot of teachers, both from the villages and the city, are expecting support from their directors.
4. The need for support in developing the competences related to the use of IT-communication technology.
- The teachers are expecting support in the following areas:
- the equipment of all classrooms in portable and desktop computers with proper software;
  - increasing the educational offer of support centres in the area of using IT-communication technology in kindergarten and early education;
  - improving the accessibility of computer rooms at schools which are mainly reserved for IT classes.

## Summary

The above research results do not fully reflect the complex issue of the diagnosis of professional competences and needs in terms of kindergarten and early education teachers' professional improvement. A few factors made it difficult for us to carry out the research process. Such factors included the individual aspect of the research on the teachers' replies concerning their own professional competences. The very fact of taking up and conducting the research was a significant challenge, and the prepared results shall be a perfect feedback for the teachers and directors of institutions in which the research was carried out.

Most of the respondents are nominated and certified teachers, with a long working experience, i. e. almost at the top of the formal career path of a teacher. The analysis of the research results allows us to create a thesis that – on the one hand – the teachers perceive themselves as people with a great experience and potential, and – on the other hand – they often assess their competences in particular areas to be at the



second level in a three-level scale (e.g. in preparing educational curricula, elaborating methods of work, etc.). In this context, it is understandable that the teachers expect methodological support from special institutions and experts who help schools solve didactic and educational problems.

Also, it is worth mentioning that the teachers often emphasized the need for cooperation and support from the directors of schools and other institutions. Thus, it is necessary to implement systemic solutions in supporting the teachers – not only those who only begin their work after completing the studies, but also those whose (due to, e.g. the function of a trainee teacher supervisor) professional competences should be at the highest level. At the same time, apart from the traditional forms of improvement based on the provision of information, the teachers especially need contact with mentors (guides, masters).

Based on the research results and their interpretation, we can define a few practical conclusions and suggestions related to the improvement of teacher professional competences.

1. Taking into account the teacher's responses to the question concerning diagnostic competences, it is necessary to constantly improve recognising the child's needs and environment, as well as collecting information using different forms, ways and methods. The teachers need improvement in the following areas: creating diagnostics tools, formulating conclusions from the diagnoses, formulating recommendations for further work, communicating the results of the diagnoses, identifying developmental deficits, identifying the reasons for difficulties with learning, solving conflicts with parents, preparing an individual plan of working with the child, and modifying the social and educational programme. Also, we should consider introducing selected sociometric techniques into the child diagnosis.
2. The problems with preparing educational and social programmes were noticed nearly at all the analysed methodical competence levels, which is why the offer of professional improvement should include methodical workshops during which teachers shall be able to prepare their own programs with the help of experienced practitioners. Educators or other specialists should think about inventing more efficient ways of improving the ability to differentiate the level of requirements for children/students with different needs and developmental opportunities. Also, it is worth to organise a lot of different forms of improvement that enable mutual exchange of experiences.
3. As for the organisational competences in professional improvement, we should take into account the teachers' years of experience. Those with a short experience should be offered courses or training sessions preparing them for the fulfilment of tasks resulting from the core curriculum; others should be offered

courses in efficient organisational solutions (first of all, the organisation of work with a team of children at different ages, with different levels of knowledge or skills, different intellectual and emotional levels, as well as varied pace of work), methodical workshops dedicated to the organisation of educational projects, sport competitions or events in which local communities also participate.

4. In the area of improving IT-communication competences, first of all, we should take into account the organisation of IT training sessions for the teachers who conduct IT classes, the presentation of safe practices with the use of computers while working with children, and the inclusion of Moodle platform modules into training sessions. Also, it is worth trying to analyse the existing multimedia materials and didactic aids in terms of their didactic and methodological quality.

The above mentioned conclusions are only suggestions for the improvement of professional competences of kindergarten and early education teachers. It is worth to note that the problems discussed in the article are a part of the current discussion on the challenges related to the professionalization of kindergarten and early school teachers.

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