

THE COMPETENCE APPROACH IN THE CULTURAL-AND-PEDAGOGICAL FIELD OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS

(Review article)

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Abstract

Contemporary requirements in all cultural-and-pedagogical fields and education within their realm accentuate on the following problems whose conceptualization and methodological basis give direction to future studies in educational science on three levels: 1) sociological - in the search for solutions of the existing contradictions between the objective social requirements to education and the actual realization of these requirements through the application of the competence approach; 2) theoretical - building the theoretical grounds for the development of key competences in students; 3) practical - to cooperate in improving the educational practice in the field of Physical Education and Sports and orienting this field towards developing key competences as personality traits and needs.

Keywords: *competence, sociological plan, theoretical plan, practical applicable plan, training, competitive sport preparation, special physical preparation, sports methodical preparation, sports education, sports technical and tactical skills*

The vision for ‘knowledge-based economics’ is based on the necessity for the transformation of educational systems *from systems which give a life-long knowledge to systems for the acquisition of life-long competences*. It is another attempt to solve the problems related to the improvement of the quality and the efficiency of *modern education seen as ‘a practice-oriented process’ and an important ‘economic potential’*, as a main factor for social and cultural integration in the global world.

The necessity for a new quality of educational results is obvious and therefore imposes the broader use of the competence approach on all levels of education. This approach is in accord with the basic concept accepted in most developed countries for educational results in the form of competences seen as *‘an indicator of the human capital’*.

The competence approach in modern education

The problem of improving the quality of education gains in importance and topicality and its solution is becoming closely related to the *competence approach*. The competence approach was at first used to enhance and evaluate the qualification of adults and improve students’ training at university. In recent years it has been applied even in secondary education. The educational results achieved through the application of this approach are no longer related with acquiring knowledge, skills and habits but with the mastering of competences neces-

sary for the personal development and the social realization of the modern individual. This tendency requires the substitution of a technocrat paradigm with a humanist, *individual-oriented constructivist educational paradigm*, which aims at the formation of important personal and social qualities in the individual such as independence, self-control and self-reflection, responsibility and other *key competences*.

The competence approach is treated as an objective necessity related to the ‘constant re-orientation of the dominant educational paradigm where the main transition is from acquiring knowledge and skills to the mastering of a number of competences meaning potential and ability (...) for steadily developing activities in the contemporary multi-factor social-and-political, information and communication-oriented society’ (Selevko (Селевко), 2004). This approach leads contemporary education to the development of personal qualities, competences and competencies in the individual which allow him/her to act accordingly in the activities s/he is involved in.

There are *four main stages* in the evolution of the competence approach and the terms of *competence* and *competency* which are related to it. On the first stage of its development (1960-1970), the competence approach was widely used mainly in the theory of language, generative grammar, first and second language teaching and other spheres of linguistics. Gradually, (in the beginning only in written norms and regulation) the educational

systems were being transformed from structural-and-quantity, i.e. related to knowledge-based aims, goals and assessment to competence approach based on assessing of their importance for the individual's development, his/her socialization and self-realization through integrated (integral) results (ability to integrate knowledge, skills and attitude within a particular context) realized in basic competences. The world-wide educational practice today connects the educational results mainly to the built competences. Thus, UNESCO, EU and other international organizations have recommended the development of the national programs and strategies for enhancing the quality of educational services and education through the applying of the competence approach.

This is how the *second stage starts (1970-1990)* and the changes in the regulations and technology in the European educational space begin. The second stage of the development of the competence approach is related to its broader use in the theory of language and language teaching as well as other spheres of education such as: educational policy and practice, sociology, psychological and pedagogical theories and practices and particularly in the development of tests and standards. The contents of the notional pair *competence-competency* are enriched and a more detailed interpretation of competence is given describing it as a notion comprising many constituents, many of which are independent of each other and can be reciprocally interchanged in building an effective behavior (...) i.e. *types of competences or motivated abilities* (Raven, 1984).

At the *third stage (1990-2000)* the notion of competence is further developed and differentiated into different types of competence. Thus, it becomes broader but often no distinction is made between *competence* and *competency*. Together with the on-going research in the field of competence approach, recommendations from different international organ and organizations are made regarding educational policy such as UNESCO's four pillars of knowledge- learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together (Delore (Делор), 1998). Gradually, in the scientific and in the international community the *competence* approach becomes an inseparable part of the new educational paradigm together with the term pair *competence/competency* as the two terms are not yet clearly identified and differentiated. Nevertheless the term pair *competence/competency* is used also in economics, politics, culture, etc. but mainly in the developed western countries. Meanwhile in Russia and other countries attempts are made for defining the difference between competence and competency and the combining of the competence approach with other approaches.

The fourth, so far unfinished stage (after 2001) outlines more clearly *the contours of the notional and terminological apparatus* of the competence approach. The possibilities for its application in educational practice in many countries become more numerous and research is made and discussion initiated on determining and evaluating key competences and other technical aspects of competence-based education. The already accepted con-

cept for using the *competence approach in the developing of new educational standards*, secures the necessary transition to competence construction of the educational results, aims, and contents while developing a *monitoring system* for quality of educational results achieved through individualization and application of the interactive methods in educational activity.

When seeking paths for achieving such educational results and criteria for their evaluation, a new methodology of contemporary education embedded in the competence approach is developed. Its specifics reflect the new realities of social needs, economic priorities and dominating tendencies in a globalizing world. Thus, the aims of modern education are not so much related to acquiring knowledge, skills and habits in a certain field but to the developing of a scope of humanist values for integrated perception (interdisciplinary) of reality – actual and virtual and it is the competence approach that lays the grounds of the modern paradigm of development of interdisciplinary science and technology and of an education that integrates their achievements (Tsankov & Genkova (Цанков & Генкова, 2009).

As argued above, the competence approach has a wide applicability, authenticity and importance but no pretensions to be exclusive or 'irreplaceable'. Moreover, competence approach and all other approaches developed and applied in education have their own goals and proper ways/time of application. Although approaches in education do not have a strict hierarchy, they are usually applied in combination and without being considered as absolutes. There is cooperation between different approaches in education; they complement each other through relating to the separate aspects and components of educational process.

Therefore, the particular approaches seen as starting positions for the analysis and discussion of the various sides of the complex and multi-component process of education should not be opposed to one another but should be combined so that the goals set by the individual and the society in forming and developing competences and competencies can be achieved.

It is necessary to clarify the contents of the notions of competence and competency and to outline the complex relation between the both notions; also to characterize thoroughly the competence approach itself, its peculiarities and relations to other approaches – innovative or traditional, the options for their combined application- selective, collective or dominating, pragmatic-and-normative or rational-and-methodological. These options alone or in different combinations are realized in the educational practices of most Europeans and other countries but the scientific study and discussions aiming at revealing the essence and relations within the pair *competence/competency* are still continuing.

Competence/competency - personality/norm and/or concept/event pair

The characteristics of the competence approach are linked to analyzing the *competence- compe-*

tency notion pair. It is a well-known fact that notions only describe existing phenomena through the means of terms. Thus, the phenomenon of competence was known long before it was actually defined by a notion.

Competence in educational science is a basic construct, often defined as an integral individual trait, as a system of competencies structured in a particular way and integrating within itself *knowledge* and *skills* allowing the individual to independently and adequately perform in a specific context; it is also defined as an attitude of the individual towards her/himself, the others, the activity performed and its results.

Reasonable grounds for the defining of the main characteristics of notions *competence* and *competency* have been found in the conclusions about the notions *concept* and *event*. (Tsankov (Цанков), 2012). In educational science all categories (constructs) are seen as concepts of hypothetical nature, products of logical thinking and theorization which describe, explain and conceptualize. Such constructs-concepts include a number of categories and notions: consciousness, common-sense, intellect, aim, knowledge, competence, ability, motive, will, inner process (innate), scheme, etc. (Radev (Радев), 2005). This allows the interpretation of the competence as a concept which is mainly an integrated personal characteristic but also a component of reality, i.e. a sequence of events through which the individual uses its competencies.

The comparative semantic analysis shows difference in meaning between the two notions which, according to a number of authors do have different volume and contents. 'Competencies are manifested in actions, in practice and are based on an already acquired combination of knowledge, skills, experience and legal rights of an individual in a particular field, (...) while competence is a broader notion, it has greater volume and richer contents. It is related to a personal quality, peculiarity, a trait of the individual and shows competences, result of an action or activity' (Naydenova (Найденова), 2004). Competence is related to the ability of the individual to function adequately (performance) in a professional environment and demonstrate relevant behavior (Burke 1989). Despite the fact that such a definition is very limited as far as contents are concerned, it allows us to think of *competence as a manner of behavior* and evaluate not what the specialist knows but how, when and if the specialist applies what s/he has learned into practice, within a certain context through the means of specific abilities and attitudes.

Individual's competencies according to R. Boyatzis, include: knowledge; skills; abilities; individual traits; behavior at and off work. These competencies allow the individual to complete tasks within the framework of specific functions and activities (Boyatzis, 1982). The notion of competency is most often related to the ability of the individual to perform a certain activity. It is defined as 'the ability to apply knowledge, know-how and skills in a standard or/and changing situation' (Klein, 2008).

When defining notions and terms, accent is often put

on the pair competence-competency but no identification, differentiation or is made. Doubtlessly, both terms come from Latin but have derived from different words – from the adjective '*competes*', meaning *suitable, corresponding, able, knowing* and from the noun '*competent*' meaning *an exact ratio, harmonization of the parts*, both words derives from the verb '*computero*' meaning *to match, to correspond, to be able to* (Bulgarian Dictionary of Etymology (AZ) (Български етимологичен речник) (А-З), (1971, 1979); Kondakov (Кондаков), 1975; Petit Larousse en couleurs, 1980). Dictionary definitions of the two related but not entirely corresponding notions also differ but they are often used as synonyms.

Competence can also be seen as an existing opportunity (potential) for the completion of an activity in perspective through a specific professional, educational or other activity which is often fulfilled through applying competences, requirements or standards.

Competence suggests at least minimal experience in applying certain competency. Hence, the notion of *competency* is marked as a result of the education- readiness, adaptability, achievement while *competence* is defined as an integral personal trait manifested in the individual's ability and readiness to act in accord with the knowledge and experience gained in the process of education and socialization and oriented towards an independent and successful performance in an activity (Selevko (Селевко), 2004). More pragmatic views of competence are related to the ability of the individual to perform activities which are of importance to both her/him and society.

In conclusion, it can be accepted that the competence of the individual is 'a personal integrated trait which is manifested in the specifics of organizing and applying knowledge, and skills which lead to efficient solutions and behavior in various situations' (Radev (Радев), 2001). Obviously, the complex phenomenon and notion of competence (used as a collective term in the singular) includes all characteristics of the individual that have to do with personality formation and development as a result communication and acting in different types of environment- family, school, society, etc. Competence is manifested differently according to the specific traits, preferences, intellect, abilities, interests, motives of the individual and factors of the environment.

Based on experience and good practices, some possibilities for the development of competences in children can be outlined. This brings up the question of the different types of competences and their specific manifestation as competence seems to have variations that should be recognized and developed on the basis of the expectation of the society for educational and professional competencies.

When considering the pair competence- competency as a pair of a concept- event type, competence should be interpreted as a concept (construct in P. Radev's terms), i.e. a product of logical thinking necessary for the determination of certain relations between objects or events which are invisible or difficult to measure. The event of competency is a case, phenomenon, part of reality hap-

pening within the behavior or the environment, having a beginning and an end and easily measured (Radev (Падев), 2005).

To put it in other words competence is already realized competency (or a system of competencies integrated within a context) which the individual needs in order to adequately perform in practice.

In conclusion: *competence* is an *integrated personal trait, a system of competencies*, structured in a certain way and *integrating the knowledge, skills and attitudes* of the individual which are related her/him, the others, the activity the individual is involved in and its results. *Portable competencies allow the individual to act adequately and independently and perform successfully within certain context (situation).*

The systematization of the different views on competence and competency lead to the conclusion that *competence* is primarily associated to 'potential abilities', 'efficiently performed activity', 'emotional aspect and the making an activity meaningful' while *competency* has to do with pragmatics as it is 'a realized competence', 'a know-how', not 'a know-that' and it 'links knowledge to a situation'. Thus, competence is an operational and manifested competence; *competence is mainly subjective and individual while competency is objective and normative characteristic of human activity.*

Competence approach towards the cultural-and-educational field 'Physical Education and Sports'

The educational and cultural field 'Physical Education and Sport' is integral part of the general education at all levels and stages of school education within the framework of the Bulgarian educational system.

The knowledge, skills and attitudes formed by the physical and sports education are a vital component of the general knowledge of the students. They develop and maintain their physical capacity and prepare them for active, healthy way of life and regular physical exercise even after finishing high school. The training in the subject Physical Education is based on the principles for variety in the sports, technical and tactical skills and abilities, adaptability and harmony in the development of the morphosomatic qualities and motor skills (Regulation №2 of the curriculum (2000).

The general education training is carried out through the assimilation of the main and extracurricular school content with different goals being implemented at the different stages:

- elementary educational stage – an introductory stage: acquiring initial sports literacy and physical abilities;
- elementary educational stage - junior high school: acquiring general sport literacy and general physical preparation.
- The aim at sports schools is to achieve professional athlete preparation in a particular kind of sport (sports discipline).
- secondary educational stage – first level: acquiring sports literacy and special physical preparation.
- secondary educational stage – second step (first

level): achieving professional athlete preparation in a particular kind of sport (sports discipline).

- Majoring in Sports – second step (second level): achieving theoretical–methodical and professional athlete preparation (Regulation №2 of the curriculum (*Ordinance № 2* (НАРЕДБА № 2), 2000).

The goal in the initial stage at the elementary educational level is to achieve basic sports literacy and a particular level of physical capacity of the students. The teaching process of physical education and sports in the elementary school aims at forming the motor experience of the student on the way to assimilating various types of motor coordination and development of physical qualities (Ivanov (Иванов), 2012). The main educational level ends with the completion of the curriculum of the junior high school stage. The general education character of the stage defines the general education endpoint: acquiring general sports literacy. A transformation takes place – from initial acquaintance with the traditional sports to their systemic study. The expected results regarding the educational tasks at program level point the attention to mastering sports–technical and tactic knowledge and skills of the sports that are being studied: field and track sports disciplines, tourist activities, gymnastics exercises and combinations (Ivanov (Иванов), 2012). At the heart of mastering the main sports-technical and tactic skills of the sports games (basketball, football) and later in handball and volleyball is the set transfer of knowledge and skills through the games (Ivanov (Иванов), 2012).

Depending on the specific character of the subject, the curriculum allows the acquiring of a particular level of general sports literacy and physical preparation. The educational process supports the development of language literacy (terms and concepts), dealing with information and communication skills; critical thinking and problem solving; studying strategies; synchronized absorption of different aspects of the one and the same school content/topics, concepts, problem/s in two or more school subjects; abilities to outline content and functional links between processes and events, studied in other subjects; application of knowledge and skills, formed in different school subjects (Ivanov (Иванов), 2012).

The purposeful training in the particularly chosen type of sports (one of the main and one of the extracurricular core of the school content) aims at achieving special sports literacy as a necessary condition for practicing specific sports on a good level even after finishing high school. In this way, an enduring interest towards the chosen type of sport is created and socially important relations and competencies are formed (Ivanov (Иванов), 2012). Introducing the scientific usage of the concepts *competence and competency* into the theory and methods of the physical education and sport is not satisfactory, they need to be clarified in terms of content, differentiated and put under operation (to specific knowledge, skills and attitudes) in order for their sufficient formation and development to be guaranteed, through specific educational technologies.

Although there are new, well-grounded theories for motor training (training in motor activities – sports-and-technical and sports-and-strategic) as, for example, the theory based on the bio-cybernetic dynamic models of motor coordination (Rusev (Русев), a clear concept regarding the technological capacity for the formation and development of competencies, especially cognitive, is still missing in the methods of the physical education. There is research in the area of the theory and methods of physical education that confirm the notion *motor competencies* as ‘key goals of the physical education and associates them mainly with acquiring the motor skills of the particular subject’ in the context of the school education (Hardman, 2011). This is natural if we take into account that specific sports-and-technical and sports-and-tactic skills are formed and developed within the framework of the Physical Education and Sports, though these *motor competences* are not clearly defined in terms of content.

Knowledge, skills and attitude are the expected results of the Physical Education and Sport in the different educational levels and stages within the state educational requirements (standards) for school content in the cultural-and-educational field of Physical Education and Sports. Despite this fact, the entire competence approach as fundamental for the conceptualization of the goals and respectively the expected results from the education is ignored to a certain degree. Although it became clear that competency needs to be considered as integrating knowledge, skills and attitudes of the individual towards the activity performed and its results, or as a system of competencies allowing adequate performance of the individual in specific context, the essence of the main constructive element of the competence – the attitude (attitudes) is not clearly differentiated, which leads to inadequate and unsuitable formation and development of the main competencies as expected result of the training in the Physical Education and Sports.

The analysis made so far leads to several main conclusions associated with the conceptualization of the competence-based approach and its subsequent operationalization and technologization within the framework of the cultural-and-educational field of Physical Education and Sports:

1. A higher level of specificity of the educational results is necessary (integrated knowledge and sports, technical and tactic abilities) at the level of the state educational requirements for school content, as a condition for their adequate projection and sufficient reflection in the school curricula in the different grades.

2. The system developed for the annual evaluation of the students in the Physical Education and Sports at the high school level will be fully applied by the teachers only when the educational results (goals) are specified into levels of competencies, integrating specific knowledge and sports, technical and tactic skills.

3. The application of the competence approach in the physical education and sport at the different levels and steps of education will contribute for bringing the educational goals of this school subject to the fore and

will popularize its cognitive values, thus making the evaluation of the students an integral part of the teaching process, defining its effectiveness and efficacy.

4. There are opportunities for extending and continuing the research programme for the application of the competence approach to the training in the cultural-and-educational sphere of Physical Education and Sports, directed at examining the personal characteristics of the students related to the correlations between the main competences as basis for identifying the individual’s profile.

5. Examining the correlation between the level of development of the main competencies set as normative requirements for the completion of a particular educational stage or level and the results of the students in the state exams, as well as the changes in their professional orientation, is valuable topic for research for the people specializing in the methods of physical education and training.

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