

Quality Assurance in the School Environment

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Abstract

Quality of school is an important factor in terms of its existence. It is an important element in the decision-making of the applicants when choosing a school. Successful may be the high-quality schools that prepare pupils adequately for life. In the paper, we are dealing with the quality of the school environment in connection with the future employability and application of the secondary vocational school graduates in professional practice. We concentrate on the key competencies that make it easier for people to be successful at work and in social and personal life. We focused more on communication competencies and their individual components. We present the results of the KEGA project no. 016UCM-4/2017 "Implementation of the project of quality assurance for graduates in the practice of secondary vocational schools." We introduce the results of the research in relation to the evaluation of the acquisition of communication competences from the point of view of pupils. We also present the views of employers on the communication competencies of their employees ("fresh" graduates).

Keywords:

Quality of school
Key competencies
Communication competencies
Project

1 Introduction

In education, quality (quality management) covers all elements: quality of the school, quality of the teaching process, quality of the education system in the state (region), quality of the teacher, quality of the teaching unit (lesson), etc. (Turek, 2015).

The paper deals with the quality of schools, in connection with the focus on development of key competencies of pupils.

Traditionally, it is the mission of the school (especially vocational) to prepare pupils for life - to prepare them for a particular profession. It was assumed that, after obtaining the relevant qualification, the school graduate will work and will continue his profession for other 30-40 years. However, the current labour market situation shows that a citizen is forced to change or at least innovate his/her qualification to ensure an adequate quality of his/her life. This fact supports the current philosophy of open - lifelong learning. The society of the future will be a learning society. This is a major challenge for schools and especially for teachers, since it requires a change in the content of education and the teacher-pupil relationship. From the point of view of the content of education, it will be necessary to strike a balance between a broad base enabling graduate flexibility and labour market requirements (Albert, 2002).

In this context, it is important for pupils to develop key competences that are appropriate to deal with different situations and problems and enable people to cope with rapid change, whether in working, social or personal life. Communication competencies belong among the key competencies. We deal with them in our paper and present the results of the research focused on pupils' communication competencies.

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2 Quality of the school in terms of focus on the development of key competencies

The quality of a school is theoretically understood as the desirable or optimal level of its functioning and the functioning of its products. Particularly in market economy conditions where schools are considered to be part of public services and pupils or their parents as school clients, the achieved quality of school is decisive for its successful existence (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 2003). Based on long-term learning experiences, Hagara, Ružinská, Jakúbek, Paľun (2015) have come to the conclusion that the main distinguishing symbol of the school is the quality that plays an important role in the life of each of us in the field of education.

If school should be considered a quality institution, it is important for graduates to be applicable for the labour market. It is necessary for the school to develop the key competences of the pupils that they can use in different professions and positions. Competence is understood as the ability (behaviour, activity or complex of activities) characterized by excellence in some areas of activity. Key competencies are the most important among a set of competencies. They are well suited to addressing the whole range of unpredictable problems that enable the individual to cope successfully with rapid changes in work, personal and working life (Hrmo, Turek, 2003).

For a learning individual, any educational (cognitive, training) activities, but especially those that are useful to his or her life experience, providing him/her with a high quality education that meets the requirements of organizations and the labour market, may not be beneficial to him or her (Blaško, 2016).

Goleman (2000) summarized the results of several studies focused on the qualities that employers expect their staff and sort them by relevance:

- ability to learn, develop labour skills and improve work performance,
- ability to listen and communicate,
- adaptability,
- creativity,
- managing failures and obstacles at work,
- self-control, reliability,
- motivation to advance in organizational hierarchy, pride in work results,
- an effort for group and interpersonal efficiency, teamwork and negotiation ability,
- performance, ambition and managerial skills (Hrmo, Turek, 2003).

As stated by Gabrhelová and Krištofiaková (2017) in their publication, in the DeSeCo programme (The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies "DeSeCo"), key competencies are classified in the three broad categories outlined in Figure 1.

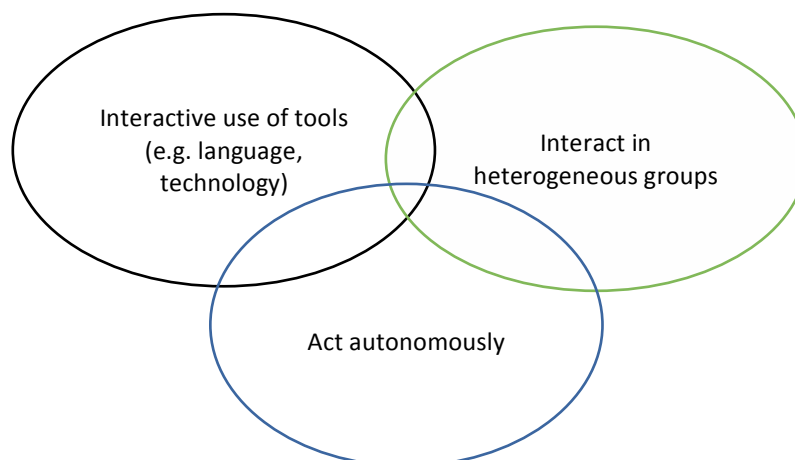


Fig. 1 Competence categories according to the document The Definition and Selection of Key Competencies, Executive Summary (ŠPÚ, 2017)

Based on the meta-analysis of key competences research abroad and the analysis of current, and in particular prospective needs of Slovakia, Hrmo and Turek (2003) proposed the following six categories of key competences: information, teaching, cognitive, interpersonal (social) communication and personnel.

For the purposes of our contribution, the following section addresses the communication competencies and their individual components, which we consider to be important for better graduates assertion practice.

3 Communication competencies

People express information, communicate through images, graphs, symbols. The ability to speak orally and in writing in an appropriate way, to listen to others, to process written material, to explain and to represent, to read with comprehension, to use the information obtained by reading, to communicate also verbally belongs to the key competences we call communication competencies (Hrmo, Turek, 2003).

Communication competencies include the competence of:

- speaking orally and in writing adequately to the situation (also in two EU languages),
- reading comprehension,
- listening attentively,
- choosing the optimal form and method of communication,
- processing written material in a comprehensible manner,
- presenting information - Explain and illustrate clearly, briefly, accurately, comprehensibly,
- communicating through information and communication technologies (Hrmo, Turek, 2003).

Acquiring communication skills by pupils is possible through different teaching methods and strategies. We present some of the Blaško (2016) teaching strategies: teamwork and cooperative learning, leading the pupil to regular mutual exchange of views in conversations and discussions in teaching, oral and written presentations of pupils (projects, papers, discussion, etc.), brainstorming, simulation, role play, experiential teaching, final thesis processing (presentation in PowerPoint, written, graphic, pictorial expression) and their presentation before others, use of school magazine, pupils' participation in radio sessions, use of information technologies for information gathering and output, the participation of pupils in public professional and cultural events, the use of foreign language not only in teaching, but also in exchange mobility, non-teaching activities, cognitive tours, international debates, etc., activities enabling communication with various age groups of pupils and the adult population.

We consider it important to create a favourable climate in the teaching process and we agree with Hanuliaková, Hasajová and Porubčanová (2016) that pedagogical reality requires the teacher's work with pupils in terms of eliminating and managing pupils' potential or real stressful states.

The issue of the quality of the school in relation to the quality of secondary vocational school graduates is dealt with in the activities carried out by our project team and some of the activities are presented in other parts of the paper.

4 Project KEGA 016UCM-4/2017 "Implementation of the project for improving the quality of graduates into practice at secondary technical and vocational schools"

As part of our activities, we are solving the tasks and objectives of the KEGA project no. 016UCM-4/2017 "Implementation of the project for improving the quality of graduates into practice at secondary technical and vocational schools". The project reflects the programme statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic in the field of regional education focusing on secondary vocational schools oriented on the vocational training of pupils in technological fields and natural sciences. As part of our activities, we are solving the tasks and objectives of the KEGA project no. 016UCM-4/2017 "Implementation of the project for improving the quality of graduates into practice at secondary technical and vocational schools". The project reflects the programme statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic in the field of regional education focusing on secondary vocational schools oriented on the vocational training of pupils in technological fields and natural sciences.

We are focusing on enhancing the quality of teaching through a professionally focused portfolio developed on the basis of a target group analysis of the needs of the above-mentioned project and on the creation of modern, content-compatible and effective sets of teaching materials. The project is oriented to the development and creation of new didactic-methodical and teaching materials for selected secondary vocational schools in technological fields of study and natural sciences. We focus primarily on enhancing communication competencies in the target professional environment of vocational school pupils by implementing project-based teaching and experiential education with the support of modern technologies. We anticipate the impact of the implemented activities on the specific target groups: citizen, employer, public administration, etc., but above all on the educational institution and the trainees - participants in the education. We expect direct socio-economic benefits in enhancing the quality, as well as the value, demand and applicability of graduates of secondary vocational education in the European labour market, and also in qualitative and performance indicators in industrial practice.

5 Research results in the field of the communication competencies of pupils in secondary vocational schools

In connection with the previous information, we were interested in the opinion of the pupils of secondary vocational schools (in final year of their studies) on their communication competencies. We were interested in how pupils themselves perceive their readiness for practice, for the labour market.

For comparison, we also conducted research among employers and we investigated their satisfaction with communication competencies of the vocational school graduates they employ.

We investigated the views of the individual components of communicative competence as shown below the graph.

Pupils assessed how they master the competency of each of these components of communication competence on the following scale: excellent (1), very good (2), good (3), weak (4), unsatisfactory (5). On the same scale, the employers evaluated their employees ("fresh graduates") or mastering the competency of employees in each of the mentioned components of communication competence, 243 pupils of secondary vocational schools and 138 employers were involved in the research. Respondents' answers are shown in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3.

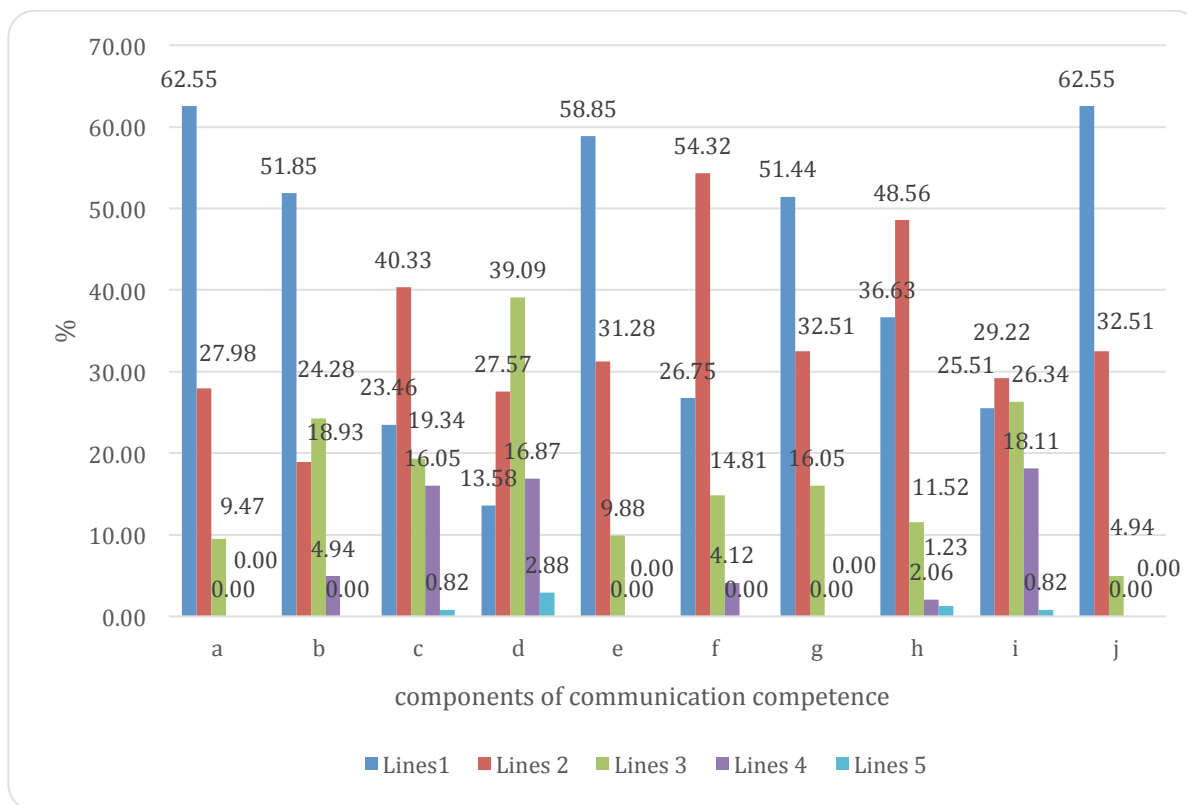


Fig. 2: Opinions of pupils on mastering the communication competencies

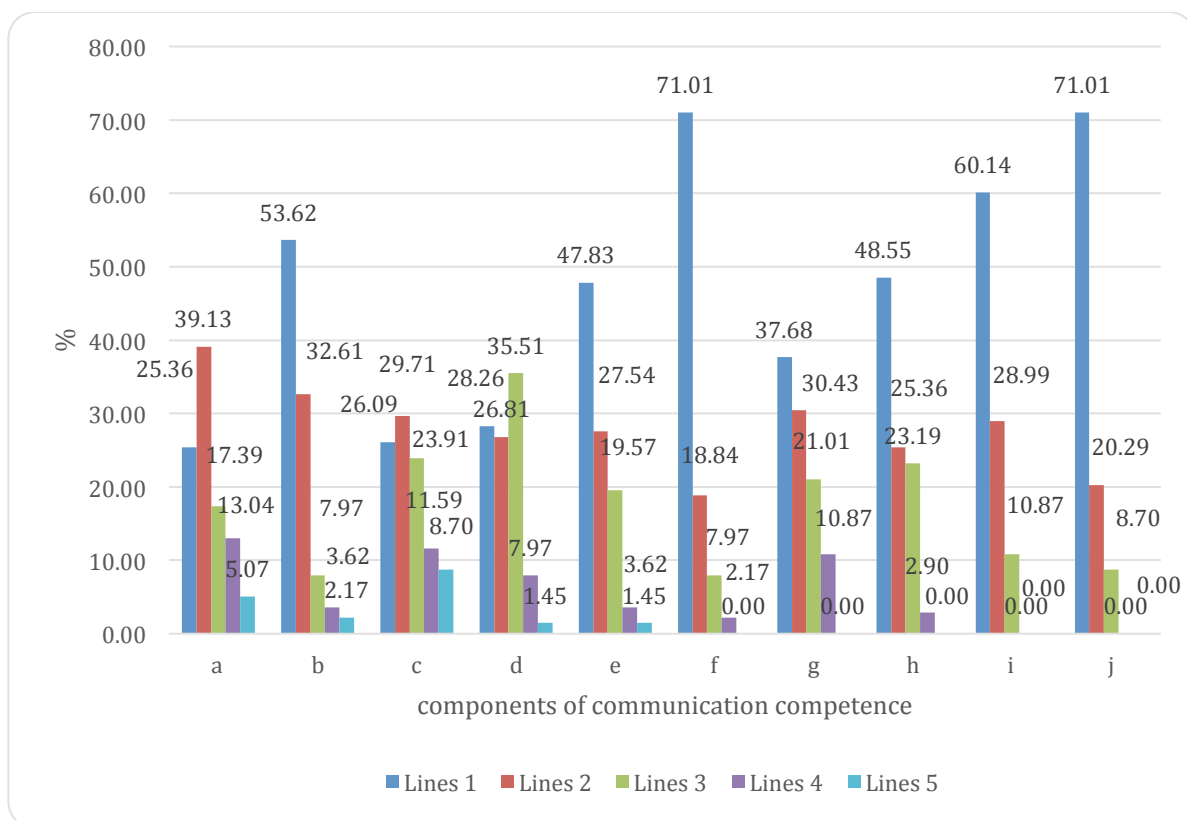


Fig. 3: Opinions of employers on mastering the communication competencies

Graphs key:

Components of communication competence:

- a) speaking orally adequately to the situation,
- b) communicating in writing adequately to the situation.
- c) speaking orally in a foreign language adequately to the situation,
- d) communicating in writing in a foreign language adequately to the situation.
- e) reading comprehension,
- f) listening attentively,
- g) choosing the optimal form and method of communication,
- h) to process written material in a comprehensible manner,
- i) presenting information - Explain and illustrate clearly, briefly, accurately, comprehensibly
- j) communicating via information and communication technologies.

Scales: Lines 1 - excellent, Lines 2 – very good, Lines 3 - good, Lines 4 - weak, Lines 5 - unsatisfactory.

The analysis of complex results shown that pupils considered themselves to be best prepared in the following components of communication skills: "communicating via ICT", "speaking orally" and "reading comprehension". The worst evaluation was for the components: "express in writing in a foreign language as appropriate", "to present information" and "to speak orally in a foreign language as appropriate".

Employers rated the graduates as the best in components of following communicational skills: "communicating via ICT", "listening attentively" and "presenting information". The worst part was "speaking orally in a foreign language adequately to the situation", "speaking verbally in an appropriate manner" and "speaking orally adequately to the situation".

The statistically significant differences between the views of pupils and employers were demonstrated in "presenting information" (it was the worst rated component among pupils, while employers classified it among the best rated components), and in "speaking orally adequately to the situation" (pupils classified this component among the best rated, while employers among the worst rated ones).

6 Conclusion

In the paper, we discussed the importance of the quality of school at the present time in terms of the preparedness of pupils for practice. We focused on key competencies and, above all, on communication skills and their importance in relation to the employment of graduates in the labour market.

We introduced the KEGA project 016UCM-4/2017 "Implementation of the project for improving the quality of graduates into practice at secondary technical and vocational schools". We presented the results of research focusing on self-evaluation of the pupils in communication skills, and the employees evaluation of communication skills of their young employees ("fresh graduates"). We believe that our project will contribute to the improvement of the key competencies of graduates and their application in practice.

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