

Beginner Student Teachers and Their Self-efficacy

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Abstract – The article presents the results of a research into the self-efficacy of student teachers in the first year of the bachelor's programme Teaching in nursery schools in relation to the parents of their prospective pupils. The quantitative research realized at the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové (Czech Republic) using a questionnaire called 'Teachers' Self-efficacy in Cooperation with Parents'. The results published here represent the basis of a long-term research project aiming to monitor the development (stagnation, increase) of the self-efficacy of our students in cooperation with parents in the context of their preparation for teaching practice.

Index Terms - self-efficacy; cooperation with parents; study of teaching.

1. Introduction

The examination of self-efficacy in collaboration with parents does not reflect the actual ability of the students but their subjective idea of it. Bandura [1] explains that self-efficacy is closely connected with self-concept and it is an important potentiality of the teacher's success. Slight overestimation of the ability on the part of the teacher helps him/her to overcome obstacles and contrarily, an underestimation of potentialities makes dealing with obstacles more difficult.

In 2014 we used the questionnaire of Gavora and Majerčíková [6] called 'Teachers' Self-efficacy in Cooperation with Parents' to examine the self-efficacy of student teachers in the third year of the programme Teaching for Nursery Schools at the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové [8]. The total score of the students ranged from 3.25 to 3.44, which is above the middle of the five-point scale. Thus, we found out that students in the third year mostly have confidence in their ability to cooperate with parents. The results encouraged us to ask the following questions: What is the confidence of student teachers in the first year in their ability to cooperate with parents? Does their self-confidence depend on what type of secondary education they had? In which dimensions should the self-concept of students be supported at the beginning and in the course of their study?

2. Theoretical background

According to Bandura [1], the term self-efficacy refers to the evaluation of one's own potentialities to perform certain activities and is formed based on authentic experience, mediated experience or belief. The process of gaining experience described by Svatoš [9] as "becoming a teacher" begins in the pre-gradual preparation for the profession,

continues through the whole professional life and is affected by a number of factors.

The teacher's self-concept crucially affects the success of teaching as an acquired professional competence. Blatný [2] defines the self-concept as mental representation which is created during the process of the individual's interaction mainly with social environment. The teacher's self-concept represents an idea or a feeling that the professional activity can be managed on a certain level. It is therefore a certain degree of self-esteem that is determined by the ability of self-reflection and response to the feedback of one's surroundings. Positive evaluation induces positive perception of oneself (similarly, negative evaluation induces negative perception) and this mechanism works also in teaching preparation where a quality and effective professional preparation should be accompanied by positive background supporting the development of professional self-concept.

Extensive research carried out at the Vanderbilt University in the USA under the leadership of Hoover-Dempsey [5] examined the conviction of teachers about the importance of collaboration with parents. The basic findings give evidence that teachers who are more involved as teachers and furthermore they expend more effort engaging parents in cooperation are positively evaluated. Similar findings were presented in Pecháčková's dissertation [7] treating the cooperation of school and parents. The analysis of data gradually revealed repeating patterns of teachers' attitudes resulting in particular ways of behaviour, which were labelled "subjective strategies". The term refers to the complex of subjective beliefs of the teachers, which concern their profession and are fed by the teacher's personal characteristics and experience. Subjective strategies manifest themselves in the teachers' behaviour towards the parents of their pupils. They retrospectively influence the quality of relationships, communication and parents' attitudes to the teachers. Three strategies were identified: supportive, presentation and evasive. A teacher having supportive strategy works as an advisor or consultant, who focuses on the pupil, shows interest and empathy and through this approach to the child gains the parents' trust. Parents are more active and open to cooperation with such teachers. A Teacher relying on the presentation strategy works as a consultant and professional, focussing mainly on the education objectives, approaches the parents obligingly and with interest, however, he does not initiate cooperation with them unless there is a problem to be solved. Parents trust such teachers and accept their advice and in case of need they either initiate cooperation or wait for the teacher to contact them. Evasive strategy is characteristic of expert

teachers who believe in their own abilities and experience but not in those of the parents. In communication with parents they assume the role of the experts who know best how to work with the child. Consequently, the parents find themselves in the subordinate role of the laymen and they may feel their parental role to be jeopardized. In case of conflict, the teacher prefers to defend his professional autonomy instead of empathizing with the parents and understanding their needs. The term “professional blindness” was introduced to express this inability or unwillingness to empathize. This approach induces distrust of the parents, who are passive in the communication with the teacher and if they want to defend their needs they resort to “attack.”

In his research, P. Gavora [4] adapted the questionnaires TES (Teacher Efficacy Scale, authors Gibson and Dembu) and OSTES (Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale, authors Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk, Hoy) to Slovak educational environment. Apart from research into the dimension of potentiality of teaching perceived by the teacher, his work identified relations between the perceived teacher’s self-efficacy and gender, the grade of the school and the length of pedagogical practice. It was found that professional self-efficacy of teachers is on a good level (teachers scored above the central value of the six point scale or nine point scale range).

The profile of the graduate of a faculty of education comprises mainly professional knowledge of the subject and pedagogical skills. In the last few years, the focus has been shifting from the acquisition of theoretical knowledge of the subject to psycho-didactic education and general cultivation of the teacher’s personality, which includes the ability to communicate and cooperate with parents of the pupils. Gavora [4] states that the self-efficacy increases in the course of the study, which was confirmed by the long-term research conducted by Woolfolk Hoy in 200 (in Gavora, 2008), which monitored the development of self-efficacy since the start of the study during practice and years of studies.

The present research examines the self-efficacy of student teachers in the first year in the area of cooperation with parents in the context of university preparation for their profession.

3. Method

A. The Objective of the Present Research

To measure the self-efficacy in cooperation with parents of student teachers in the first year of their university study (the programme Teaching for Nursery Schools) at the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové The main objective comprises two secondary objectives:

1. To ascertain the level of self-efficacy in cooperation with parents of student teachers in the 1st year (based on the questionnaire Teachers’ Self-efficacy in Cooperation with Parents – in the five dimensions)
2. To find out whether there are differences in the level of self-efficacy depending on the type of secondary school from which the students graduated (pedagogical secondary school versus other schools)

B. The Research Methodology

The quantitative research was based on the questionnaire Teachers’ Self-efficacy in Cooperation with Parents’ created by Majerčíková, J. and Gavora, P. The questionnaire contains 24 scale items, which are divided into five dimensions:

1. The ability to inform the parents of the child’s well-being
2. The ability to explain the functioning of the school as an organization
3. The ability to advise parents on matters of education in the family
4. The ability to communicate with parents in a transparent manner
5. The ability to convince parents to support the school

The five point scale in all items allowed the answers in the range from 0 (no abilities) to 5 (great ability). This article presents the pilot results of student teachers in the 1st year of the programme Teaching for Nursery Schools at the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové

C. Research Questions

1. What is the level of self-efficacy in cooperation with parents of teacher students in the 1st year in the five dimensions?
2. What are the differences in the level of efficacy of student teachers in the 1st year in dependence on the type of secondary school from which they graduated?

D. The Research Group

The research sample on this 1st stage of the research comprised 24 student teachers in the first year of the bachelor’s programme Teaching for Nursery Schools at the University of Hradec Králové

4. Results

During results processing we made a primary analysis of the obtained data. Table 1 presents given arithmetical means in the five dimensions. Individual dimensions are arranged by the decreasing values of arithmetic mean.

TABLE I Arithmetic mean in the individual dimensions

Dimensions	Arithmetic mean
Ability to inform of the child’s well-being	3,5
Ability to be transparent with parents	3,12
Ability to explain the functioning of the school as an organization	3,06
Ability to convince parents to support the school	2,96
Ability to advise parents on matters of education in the family	2,78

Table 1 clearly shows that the differences in the average values in the individual dimensions are not marked, still, the best self-evaluation of the students’ abilities concerns activities that involve giving information about the child’s well-being to the parents (3,5). This dimension is saturated by five items, specifically informing about the child’s relations with other

kids, informing whether the child is doing well, what is his/her behaviour and how he/she feels about being in the kindergarten. This result is not surprising, because informing parents is one of the basic duties of the teacher towards parents, which is probably perceived by the students as a basic professional competence. In the kindergarten, it is practically an everyday activity, that is done in direct “face to face” communication of the teacher and the parent.

The second activity about which the students feel confident is the ability to communicate with parents in a transparent manner (3,12). This dimension is saturated by these items: to present the results of children; to create enough opportunities so that parents can see what they are interested in; to accept the presence of the parent in learning, anytime s/he desires it; to accept the parent’s presence in the classroom, even if it disturbs its atmosphere. In these activities there is the observation of the real life of the school and non-formal meetings take place, according to Bulla [3] they present the key point for building up the partnership between the school and the parents.

The dimension which ranked third was the ability to explain the functioning of the school as an organisation (3,06). This dimension concerns the clarification of how different school bodies work, how the money from parents is handled or how the school kitchen operates. Addressed students evaluated their abilities in the area well. They scored the highest values in the item concerning the operation of the school kitchen and the lowest values in clarifying the function of various school authorities (the activity of parents’ boards).

Presumably, the students have certain experience from their training, where they gain sufficient information about common operations (e.g. a kitchen), but feel less informed about the information concerning existing school governing bodies. It would be interesting to compare these results with the students of the Master’s programme, who have within the Framework of their study at our university the so-called master training where they study closely the management and operation of a nursery school.

The next dimension concerns the ability to persuade parents to support the school (2,96). This dimension is saturated by items asking about convincing the parents to participate at events organized by the school, to take part in organisational matters and provide financial and material support. The students have no practical experience in this area, which certainly affected the results.

The lowest arithmetic mean was scored by the ability to advise parents on the matters of education in the family (2,78). The abilities belonging to this area include: explaining the parents how they should build up a healthy self-esteem of the child; suggest ways of solving educational issues of the child; clarify the consequences of inadequate upbringing in the family; explain in what way to improve the influence on the behaviour of their child. The surveyed students feel the greatest self-efficacy about the explanation, how to build up healthy self-esteem of children and how to solve educational

issues of children. The lowest self-efficacy is felt about the explanation of inappropriate family upbringing.

These results are not surprising. They are similar to the results of the research conducted by Pecháčková et al. [8] focussing on students of the same programme in the third year. In the course of their study, students acquire knowledge of the pedagogical and psychological disciplines, which form a sufficient theoretical basis and they should be able to provide basic professional counselling. This level of professionalism is what today’s parents expect of teachers with university education. The respondents feel less confidence about clarifying the consequences of inappropriate family education, which is probably connected with the lack of experience on the part of the young students.

A comparison of results with the results of the research realized at our faculty in 2014 [8] shows that student teachers in the third year of the programme Teaching for Nursery Schools scored higher values in all the five dimensions, however, as table 2 indicates, the differences are minimal. We expected the differences in self-efficacy between the first and the third year to be more marked. Therefore, we pose ourselves the question whether the study at our university provides sufficient preparation for the communication with pupils’ parents.

TABLE 2 The comparison of arithmetic means of students in the 1st and the 3rd year

Dimension	Arithmetic mean	
	1 st year	3 rd year
Ability to inform the parents about the child’s well-being	3,5	3,64
Ability to communicate with parents in a transparent manner	3,12	3,17
Ability to explain the functioning of the school as an organization	3,06	3,43
Ability to convince parents to support the school	2,96	2,98
Ability to advise parents on matters of education in the family	2,78	3,05

Another goal was to ascertain whether there are any differences in the level of self-efficacy of first year students depending on the type of secondary school from which they graduated. Pedagogical secondary schools offer enough space to gain experience during practical training in nursery schools. Therefore, we supposed that pedagogical school graduates would feel more confident in the individual dimensions than graduates from other schools (of technical or economic specialization). Table 3 presents the comparison of scores in the individual dimensions.

TABLE 3 Comparison of the arithmetic means of the graduates

Dimension	Arithmetic mean	
	Pedagogical secondary school	Other secondary schools
Ability to inform the parents about the child's well-being	3,9	3,33
Ability to communicate with parents in a transparent manner	3,33	3,03
Ability to explain the functioning of the school as an organization	3,53	2,87
Ability to convince parents to support the school	3,13	2,89
Ability to advise parents on matters of education in the family	3,33	2,56

Table 3 makes it evident that graduates of pedagogical secondary schools have greater self-efficacy in cooperation with parents in all the examined dimensions. Nevertheless, the differences are minimal and statistically insignificant. Since there were only eight graduates of pedagogical secondary schools in the first year (all participated in the research), it is impossible to formulate generally valid conclusions based on these results.

5. Conclusion

This part of the research measures the level of self-efficacy in cooperation with parents of first year students in the programme Teaching for Nursery Schools (analysing the data obtained through the questionnaire Teachers' Self-efficacy in Cooperation with Parents – based on five dimensions). Students in the first year of the programme Teaching for Nursery Schools scored values fluctuating around the middle of the six point scale (from 0 to 5), so we may state that they rather believe in their abilities to communicate with parents.

Another aim was to find out whether there are any differences in the level of self-efficacy of first year student teachers in the programme Teaching for Nursery Schools depending on the type of secondary school from which the students graduated (pedagogical secondary school versus other schools). The results showed that graduates of pedagogical secondary schools have higher levels of self-efficacy in communication with parents in comparison with students from

other schools (technical or economical), which applies to all the five examined dimensions.

These results form a basis for further long-term research project, which is going to comprise three subsequent surveys in two-year intervals using identical methodological procedures and working with the same groups of students (2015 – 1st year students, 2017 – 3rd year students, 2019 – 5th year students). The purpose of this research is to monitor the development (e.g. stagnation or increase) of self-efficacy of our students in cooperation with parents in the context of their preparation for teaching practice.

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