

Chapter 7

Student Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Diversity and Social Inclusion

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the competencies for inclusion developed by students of the Degree in Primary Education. After an analysis of the general competencies taught in the degree, the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for inclusion of trainee teachers were analysed. To achieve these objectives, a non-experimental, cross-sectional, and descriptive research design was carried out. A total of 440 students on the degree course in Primary Education at the University of La Laguna (Spain) took part in the study. The data were collected with a questionnaire developed ad hoc based on the inclusive competency profile developed by the EADSNE project (2012). The results showed that there was positive development of the competencies included in the profile. Therefore, the students had developed the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to deal with diversity and become inclusive teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, it is necessary to train Primary Education teachers who are able to manage the classroom, adapting its dynamics to the diversity of the existing student body. Teachers must therefore develop the necessary competencies to respond to diversity in the classroom and offer an effective education for all, attending to the needs and characteristics of all students (Arnaiz, 2002). This chapter will analyse the competencies that future primary school teachers need to acquire, with an emphasis on the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for a teacher to be inclusive when teaching.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the general competencies and the different training profiles of the Degree in Primary Education in Spain and a description of the competencies of the inclusive teacher, before moving on to a second part focusing on analysis of the development of these competencies in the degree course students. Subsequently, the results are analysed and in the last part

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of this chapter the discussion is held and conclusions are drawn, reflecting on the possible practical implications derived from this research.

The Term Competency: An Approach to Teaching Competencies

For decades, the term competency has occupied an increasingly relevant place in educational discourses on the curriculum and training in general (Monarca et al., 2012). Proof of this is the effort made in the last decade to offer the most complete definition possible of what competency means. The term competency first became popular in the workplace (Cano, 2007; Denyer et al., 2007; García-San Pedro, 2009), but the need to train professionals capable of responding to the needs of today's society has led to this concept being extrapolated to the field of education, with the aim of coordinating university training with the professional world (Riesco, 2008; Rodríguez, 2007). Competency training has become one of the mainstays of the knowledge society, which aims to establish a new mode of relationship between the individual and society (Villar, 2009).

For Perrenoud (2004), the concept of competency refers to the ability to mobilise several cognitive resources (knowledge, skills, attitudes, etc.) in order to deal with a specific situation, as competencies have a contextual component in which they must be applied to resolve a particular complex situation. Denyer et al. (2007) also place resource mobilisation at the core of the concept of competency, and Guzmán and Marín (2011) consider it to be a common element in the various definitions of competencies that have been developed. Furthermore, Le Boterf (2002) adds that a competent person is able to regulate their actions and not only depend on their own resources but is able to search for complementary resources to transfer and reverse their skills in order to be effective in different contexts.

Although there is no universal definition, attempts have been made to establish key competencies for working in both Elementary and Higher Education. For this reason, the Tuning Project (2003) aims to harmonise Europe's educational structures, creating a system of recognisable and comparable university qualifications (González & Wagenaar, 2003; Lupiáñez, 2014; Rodríguez, 2007). The Tuning Project aims to provide an integrated vision of the concept of competencies, which are situated on a continuum and can therefore be measured along this continuum in relation to the level of mastery and as the end product of an educational process. In this sense, a person who has a competency is able to "manifest a certain ability or skill or, by performing a task, can demonstrate that he/she is able to perform it in such a way that the level of achievement of the task can be measured" (González & Wagenaar, 2003, p. 80).

Along these lines, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation in Spain (ANECA), whose purpose is to manage quality policies in Spanish universities, states that all educational actions carried out in Higher Education should be aimed at the acquisition of competencies by students. For this agency, competency is defined as the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are acquired or developed through coordinated training experiences, which are intended to achieve functional knowledge that respond efficiently to a task or problem of everyday and professional life that requires a teaching and learning process (ANECA, 2012, p. 20).

It should also be considered that the Degree in Primary Education in Spain is regulated by Order ECI/3857/2007, of 27 December, which sets the requirements for the verification of official university degrees that qualify students to practise the profession of Primary Education teacher. This regulation establishes the competencies that students must achieve in order to work appropriately in the classroom. In addition, universities may add the competencies that they consider suitable to complete the training

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