

# Teacher Competences Development - a Guarantee of Sustainable High Level of Education and Training

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**Abstract** – Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra has long been involved in pre-service and in-service teacher training, and for several decades has had a range of research activities aimed at educating teachers and developing their competences. Currently the team of its researchers tackles the APVV-14-0446 project which focuses on the assessment of teachers' competences and the range of importance of which was experimentally tested. The collected data were analyzed using non-parametric statistical method. In the article, the authors present and discuss their findings.

**Keywords** – competence, teacher, assessment, research data, Kruskal-Wallis' Test.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has undergone long-term development and currently is presented in various international documents, in particular, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [1]. The 2030 Agenda states seventeen priorities for sustainable development. One of them,

related to the area of education, claims the necessity to ensure inclusive, fair and high-quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Increased attention has to be paid to education and training in terms of developing competences (knowledge, abilities, and skills) relevant to sustainable development and attitudes that help us to take responsible solutions. Care must therefore be taken to the quality of education and training of teachers.

At present, when competences are considered and discussed in the context of current changes characterized by globalization, individualism, hedonism, information society development, and sustainable development. As education plays an important role in the development, developing and evaluating teachers' competences are a guarantee of a sustainable high level of education and training. [2], [3], [4] Education and learning is a process, and if it is to be successful, it must be purposeful and complex, avoiding threatening or destructive factors.

The guarantee of the sustainable development of education and training is continuity connected with change. Changes are inevitable and have their place in the context of time and society. We must be aware of the fact that life brings a lot of changes and different challenges. We can never prepare a pupil or a will-be-teacher for all possible situations that may occur in their life unless we focus on developing their competences. Therefore, the life of a man is closely linked to both formal and informal, institutional and non-institutional, lifelong learning. The acquired facts change, but the competences remain. Emphasis is primarily placed on the development of competences, the efficiency and development of which are regularly verified in different situations regardless of the current time and environment [5], [6]. In Slovak society, there are some prejudices linked to the evaluation process in general, not just to the assessment of the teacher's competences [7], [8]. We have been working on the project APVV-14-0446 *Assessment of teacher competences* for four years

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now and have found that the prejudices associated with the assessment are deeply rooted in the minds of teachers [9], [10]. Most of them have a negative attitude towards any assessment of their competences. It is connected with the fact that the process of evaluation itself and the findings to which the evaluators come is rarely associated with the effort to help and guide the teacher [11]. Rather, it is associated with various restrictive measures that do not motivate the teacher but strongly demotivate them.

Based on the facts stated above the focus of the paper is on teachers' competences and their assessment as studied and dealt within the project. The range of importance of the competences was experimentally tested. The collected data were analyzed using non-parametric statistical method. In the article, the authors present and discuss their findings.

## 2. Research method

As a part of the project, questionnaires were developed for teachers and school head teachers. They focused on mapping the current state in the area of assessment of teacher competences in Slovakia. The aim of the questionnaires was to find out what is the attitude of teachers towards evaluation of their competences, how often they are evaluated, who evaluates them, which of their competences are the ones most frequently assessed, and others. An anonymous questionnaire contained eleven questions. A survey sample is represented by 730 respondents, teachers from primary and secondary schools from all over Slovakia. The questionnaires were distributed and filled in by teachers in the period of September 2015 - January 2016.

The first five questions of the questionnaire were focused on the characteristics of the respondents - gender, length of their teaching at schools, completed education, subjects they currently teach, and the type and location of the school they have been employed at. The questionnaires were filled in by 597 women and 133 men, i. e. women represent 82% and males 18% of the total number of respondents. To evaluate the length of their teaching at schools we split the respondents into four categories: the ones with 1-4 years, 5-10 years, 11-20 years, 21 and more years of teaching experience. The data showed that questionnaires were filled in by 59 respondents (which represents 8% out of the total number of respondents) with the length of teaching 1-4 years, 115 respondents (16%) with 5-10 years of teaching, 253 respondents (35%) with 11-20 years of teaching, and 303 respondents (41%) with a teaching experience of over 20 years. The overview of the respondents' completed education showed that the

majority of respondents had completed teacher training programs for secondary education - 534 respondents (73%), 145 respondents (20%) were qualified primary school teachers, and the least respondents were those who completed non-teaching study programs - 51 respondents (7%).

Out of the total number of respondents with qualification for secondary school education, 270 respondents (37%) completed programs aimed at teaching humanities, 184 respondents (25%) at science teaching and 80 respondents (11%) at teaching a combination of both (humanities and natural sciences subjects). Out of the total number of 730 respondents, 142 respondents (19%) have been employed in primary schools, 323 respondents (44%) in lower secondary schools, 159 respondents (22%) in grammar schools, and 106 of them (15%) in secondary vocational schools. Most respondents (301, i.e. 41%) have been employed in the schools located in the Nitra region. Other regions of Slovakia are represented by lower number of teachers involved, as follows: Žilina Region by 132 teachers (18%), Trenčín Region by 75 teachers (10%), Banská Bystrica Region - by 74 teachers (10%), Trnava Region - by 57 teachers (8%), Prešov Region - by 47 teachers (7%), Bratislava Region - by 22 teachers (3%), and Košice Region - by 22 teachers (3%).

## 3. Research findings

Current state of teacher evaluation in Slovakia was the part of the questionnaire starting from the question number six up to the question number eleven. In this part of the questionnaire, we focused on the person of the evaluator, the frequency of the evaluation, the awareness of the evaluated teacher about the results of the evaluation, the content aspects of the evaluation and the personal opinion of the evaluated teachers about their evaluation. We were especially interested in:

- 3.1. *The frequency of teacher evaluation* (Figure 1.).
- 3.2. *Content aspects of the evaluation* (Figure 2., 3., Table 1a. and Table 1b.);
- 3.3. *Level of importance of competences* (Figure 4. and Figure 5., Table 2. and Table 3.).

### 3.1. The frequency of teacher evaluation

Based on the data related to teacher evaluation frequencies (Figure 1.), it can be stated that teachers are the most frequently evaluated by the Deputy Head Teachers (up to 80% of them assess teachers once or more than once a year) and the Head Teachers (in this case 77% of the Head Teachers assess their teaching staff once, or more than once a year). 51% of the respondents said that the Chairs of the Subject Committees were at least once a year

involved in their evaluation. On the other hand, many teachers stated that they had no experience with the assessment of their teaching by inspectors (45%), or that the inspectors were coming to their schools only sporadically (50%). This is not a surprising fact if we take into consideration that according to Slovak School Law (N°317/2009) [12] inspectors are expected to come to school once in 6 years if there is no special need or requirement to inspect a school.

### 3.2. Content aspects of the evaluation

Based on the respondents' answers, the frequency of evaluation of teacher's different educational activities in lessons was analyzed and evaluated. The question and its

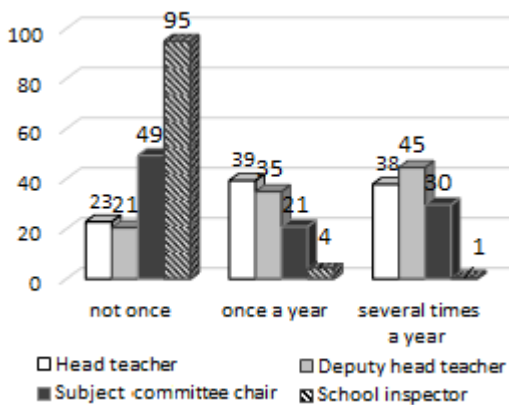


Figure 1. Frequency of teacher evaluation by different evaluators (in percentages)

aspects was expected to be answered by means of the 5-word scaling scale: never (1), almost never (2), sometimes (3), almost always (4), and always (5).

For processing purposes, the activities were coded as follows:

- Code 1 Climate and atmosphere in the classroom
- Code 2 Behavior of learners
- Code 3 Activity of learners during lessons
- Code 4 Teacher communication with learners
- Code 5 Achieved results of learners' assessment
- Code 6 Mastery of the subject matter by learners
- Code 7 Use of teaching aids
- Code 8 Used forms and methods of work with learners
- Code 9 Presentation of the subject matter to learners
- Code 10 Motivating learners
- Code 11 Conformity of the lesson content with the school educational documentation
- Code 12 Mastery of the taught subject content
- Code 13 Achievement of the lesson goals
- Code 14 Structure and course of the lesson
- Code 15 Checking the written lesson plan

The collected data are shown in Figure 2. in which it is evident that the evaluation during lesson observation is the most often focused on:

- the climate and the atmosphere in the classroom (the response "almost always" was marked by 225 respondents, what represents 31% of the total number of respondents, and the response "always" was marked by 383 respondents, what represents 52% of the total number of respondents);
- pupils' activity in lessons (the response "almost always" was marked by 218 respondents, i.e. 30% of the total number of respondents, and the response "always" was marked by 432 respondents, i.e. 59% of the total number of respondents);

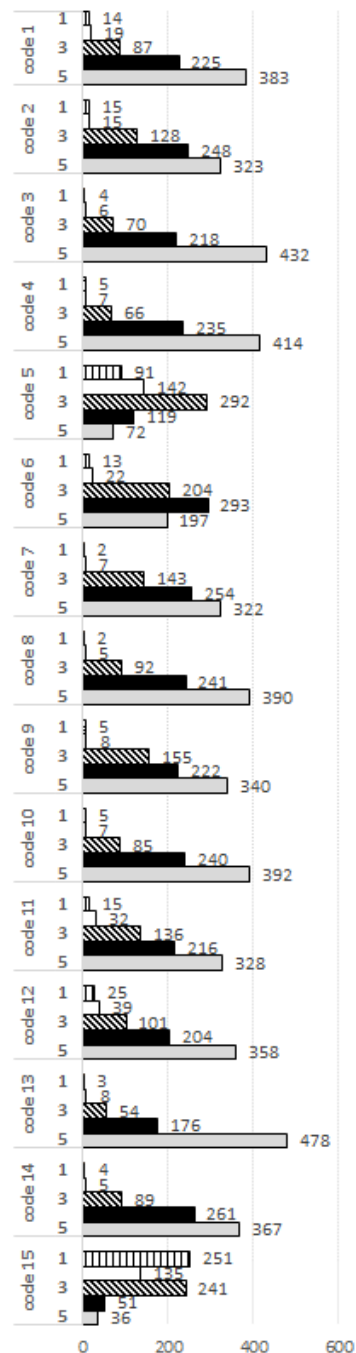


Figure 2. Assessed teaching activities of teachers

- teacher's communication with learners (the response "almost always" was marked by 235 respondents, i.e. 32% of the total number of respondents, the response "always" was marked by 414 respondents, i.e. 57% of the total number of respondents);
- used forms and methods of working with learners (the response "almost always" was marked by 241 respondents, i.e. 33% of the total number of respondents, and response "always" was marked 390 respondents, i.e. 53% of the total number of respondents);
- motivation of learners (the response "almost always" was marked by 240 respondents, i.e. 33% of the total number of respondents, the response "always" was marked by 392 respondents, i.e. 54% of the total number of respondents);
- achieving the aims and objectives of the lesson (the response "almost always" was marked by 176 respondents, i.e. 24% of the total number of respondents, the response "always" was marked by 478 respondents, i.e. 65% of the total number of respondents);
- structure and course of the lesson (the response "almost always" was marked by 261 respondents, i.e. 36% of the total number of respondents, the response "always" was marked by 367 respondents, i.e. 50% of the total number of respondents).

On the other hand, the written lessons plans as well as the archived documents showing learners' assessed achievements have almost never been the subject of evaluators' interest during the observations of teachers' educational work.

As seen from Figure 2., there are some differences in the frequency of the different educational activities evaluation of the teacher in the lesson. We have analyzed the statistical significance of these differences using the Kruskal-Wallis' test.

The Kruskal-Wallis' test is a non-parametric statistical method that allows comparing the mean values of multiple files. We have tested the zero hypothesis  $H_0$  that there are no differences in the evaluation frequencies of different educational activities of the teacher in the lesson, compared to the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$  that the observed differences are statistically significant. We have conducted the test in the STATISTICA program. After entering the input data we have calculated the tested criterion value of the Kruskal-Wallis' test:  $H = 2501.087$  and the probability value  $p = 0.000$ . The  $p$  value is the error probability we commit if we reject the zero hypothesis. If the calculated value  $p$  is sufficiently small ( $p < 0.05$  or  $p < 0.01$ ), we reject the zero hypothesis  $H_0$  (at the significance level of 0.05

or 0.01). Otherwise, the zero hypothesis  $H_0$  cannot be rejected; the observed differences are not statistically significant. We have evaluated the test based on the calculated  $p$ -value. Since the calculated probability value  $p = 0.000$  is less than 0.01, we have rejected the zero hypothesis  $H_0$  at the level of significance  $\alpha = 0.01$  in favor of the alternative hypothesis. The error we have made by this decision is almost zero (almost zero because the result is rounded to three decimal places). This means that the observed differences in the frequency of different educational activities evaluations of the teacher in the lesson are statistically significant.

In the following part of the text, we investigate by the multiple comparison method of Kruskal-Wallis' test, which sample sets differ statistically significantly from each other. Using the STATISTICA program, we have generated Table 2., which lists the corresponding probability values  $p$ . If the calculated  $p$  value is sufficiently small ( $p < 0.05$  or  $p < 0.01$ ), we reject the hypothesis that there are no differences in the evaluation frequencies of the two educational activities of the teacher in a lesson. The statistically significant probability value  $p$  is marked by the asterisk in Table 1a. and Table 1b.

The results presented in the table can be interpreted as follows. For example, the value of 0.521 indicates that there is no significant difference between the educational activities 1 and 2 in the frequency of their evaluation. On the opposite, the value of 0.044 means that there is a significant difference between the educational activities 11 and 14 as to the frequency of their evaluation. If we look at the educational activities 1 and 6, we can find that there is a significant difference between them. A significant difference has also been found between the activities 2 and 3, 3 and 5, 3 and 6, 3 and 7, 8 and 11, 12 and 13, 6 and 8 and some others.

There is no doubt that a high-quality teacher and an active learner are a guarantee of a high level of education and training. In connection with this, we were wondering whether there is a significant difference between educational activities labeled as Code 3 and Code 13. We have found that there was no significant difference between them. The more active the learner, the better (more successfully) the teacher can achieve the goal of the lesson. Similarly, there is not a significant difference between educational activities labeled as Code 4 and Code 13; it applies that the better the communication with learners is, the easier it is to achieve the set goal of the lesson. A significant difference is not even between educational activities labeled as Code 10 and Code 13; it is true that the more motivated the learners are, the easier the teacher achieves the goals of the lesson. Similarly, there is not a significant difference between the Code 8 and the Code 10 - the

more often the more diverse forms and methods with learners are used, the more motivated the learners are to work; no significant difference is also between the Codes 1 and 3 - the better the climate in the lesson, the more active the learners are.

Table 1. Results of the multiple comparison of teacher's educational activities in Kruskal-Wallis' test

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	0.52	0.56	1.00	0.00*	0.00*	1.00	1.00
2		0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	1.00	0.02*
3			1.00	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	1.00
4				0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	1.00
5					0.00*	0.00*	0.00*
6						0.00*	0.00*
7							0.07

Table 1a. Results of the multiple comparison of teacher's educational activities in Kruskal-Wallis' test - continuation of Table 1.

	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	1.00	1.00	0.09	1.00	0.00*	1.00	0.00*
2	1.00	0.01*	1.00	1.00	0.00*	0.27	0.00*
3	0.00*	1.00	0.00*	0.00*	1.00	1.00	0.00*
4	0.00*	1.00	0.00*	0.00*	1.00	1.00	0.00*
5	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*
6	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	0.00*
7	1.00	0.06	1.00	1.00	0.00*	0.86	0.00*
8	0.13	1.00	0.00*	0.19	0.07	1.00	0.00*
9		0.11	1.00	1.00	0.00*	1.00	0.00*
10			0.01*	0.15	0.08	1.00	0.00*
11				1.00	0.00*	0.04*	0.00*
12					0.00*	1.00	0.00*
13						0.00*	0.00*
14							0.00*

A significant difference is between educational activities labeled as Code 9 and Code 13 - the presentation of the subject matter to learners is not a guarantee of achieving the set goals of the lesson. Another significant difference is between the Codes 7 and 13 - the use of teaching aids is not the guarantee of achieving the goals of the lesson. What surprised us was the significant difference between the Codes 1 and 6 - it seems so that the climate and atmosphere in the class do not contribute directly and proportionally to the mastery of the subject matter by learners. Other significant differences are between the Codes 6 and 13, as well as between the Codes 2 and 3; 2 and 4, 2 and 8 and others. The obtained results are graphically represented in Figure 3.

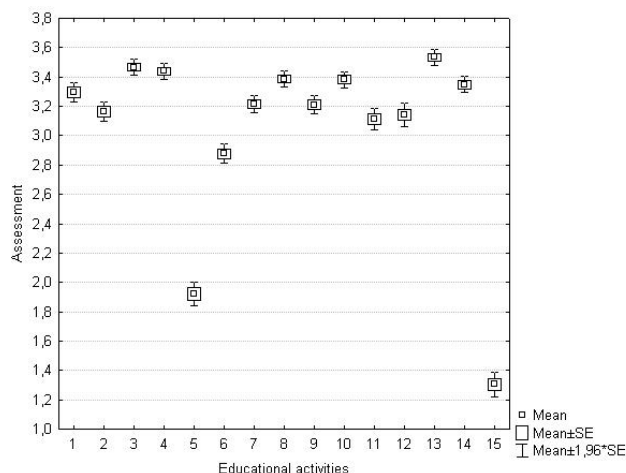


Figure 3. The extent of evaluation of teacher's educational activities

Figure 3. shows that when assessing teachers, the greatest emphasis is placed on educational activity labeled as Code 13 - achieving the objectives of the lesson and the lowest emphasis is placed on educational activity labeled as Code 15 - checking the written lesson plan. Based on the achieved score, we can divide the educational activities into those that teachers evaluate as significant, less significant or marginal. Among the significant ones, according to Figure 3., were included all the activities except the educational activities labeled as Codes 5 and 15. Out of these two, the educational activity related to checking the written lesson plan (Code 15), is considered as marginal by teachers. The educational activities labeled as Code 13, 3, 4, 8, 10 are among the most significant ones, with only the minimal difference between the most important of them - the Codes 13, 3 and 4.

### 3.3. Level of importance of competences

At present, it is a very topical question to find the most relevant and needful competences, abilities, and skills of the teacher which should form the core of their competency profile. For this reason, we also focused on finding the respondents' opinion on the importance of 10 selected professional competences using the form of a five-level scale (1 = little important, 5 = very important).

Among the identified ten key professional competences of a teacher, the following competences were included (for the purposes of their statistical processing labeled with codes 1-10):

- Code 1 - can evaluate the progress and results of teaching and learning process;
- Code 2 - can use the material resources and aids in the teaching process;

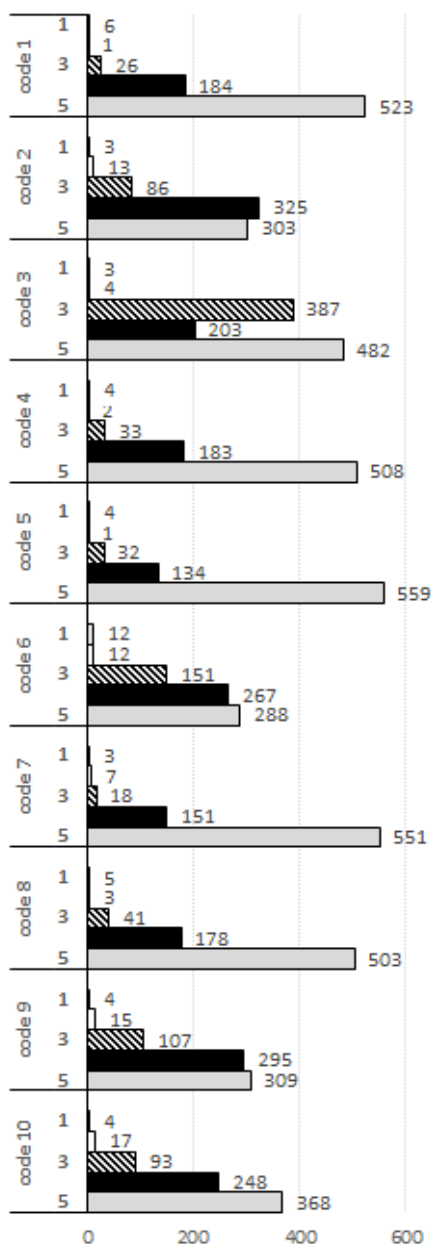


Figure 4. Level of Importance of Competences

- Code 3 - can select and implement organizational forms and teaching methods;
- Code 4 - can plan and design teaching;
- Code 5 - has mastered and can control the content and didactics of the subjects taught;
- Code 6 - can plan and carry out their professional development;
- Code 7 - create a positive climate in the class;
- Code 8 - develop the personality of the learner and their competences;
- Code 9 - can identify the psychological and social factors of learner learning;
- Code 10 - can identify the developmental and individual characteristics of the learner.

Based on the collected questionnaire data it can be stated that among the most important competences in the opinion of teachers belong the following ones:

- the teacher can develop the personality of the learner and their competences (503 respondents ranked it 5, what represents 68.9% of the total number of respondents);
- the teacher can create a positive climate in the class (551 respondents ranked it 5, what represents 75.5% of the total number of respondents);
- the teacher has mastered and can control the content and didactics of the subjects taught (559 respondents ranked it 5, what represents 76.6% of the total number of respondents);
- the teacher can select and implement organizational forms and teaching methods (482 respondents ranked it 5, what represents 66% of the total number of respondents);
- the teacher can plan and design teaching process (508 respondents ranked it 5, what represents 69.6% of the total number of respondents);
- the teacher can evaluate the progress and results of teaching and learning process (513 respondents ranked it 5, what represents 70.3% of the total number of respondents).

Figure 4. shows some differences in the assessment of the importance of the different competences. The statistical significance of these differences is again analyzed using the Kruskal-Wallis' test. In this case, the zero hypothesis  $H_0$  that in the assessment of the importance of the different competences there are no significant differences compared to the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$  that the observed differences are significant, has been tested. The test has been processed in the STATISTICA program. After entering the input data, we have generated the following output table (Table 2.).

In Table 2., the respective sample ranges (Valid N) and the calculated values of the order sums are listed for the different competences (indicated by codes 1-10). Furthermore, in the output set we have calculated the tested criterion value of the Kruskal-Wallis' test:  $H = 664.3196$  and the probability value  $p = 0.000$ . As the calculated probability value  $p = 0.000$  is less than  $0.01$ , we have rejected the zero hypothesis  $H_0$  at the level of significance  $\alpha = 0.01$  in favor of the alternative hypothesis. This means that the observed differences in the assessment of the importance of the selected competences are statistically significant.

Table 2. The ranges of the sample files and the calculated values of the ranking sums for the competences

Code	Valid N	Sum of Ranks
1	730	2969410
2	730	2182126
3	729	2851256
4	730	2945148
5	730	3115343
6	730	2027688
7	730	3100015
8	730	2914017
9	730	2167154
10	730	2376496

As in the previous section, we have determined which sample files statistically differ from each other significantly. Using the STATISTICA program, we have generated Table 3. in which the relevant probability values *p* are entered. In the table, the statistically significant probability values *p* are marked with an asterisk. The interpretation of the obtained results is the same as in the previous case.

Table 3. Results of the multiple comparison of Kruskal-Wallis' test (teacher's competences)

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	0.00*	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00*	1.00	1.00	0.00*	0.00*
2		0.00*	0.00*	0.00*	1.00	0.00*	0.00*	1.00	0.71
3			1.00	0.06	0.00*	0.11	1.00	0.00*	0.00*
4				1.00	0.00*	1.00	1.00	0.00*	0.00*
5					0.00*	1.00	0.56	0.00*	0.00*
6						0.00*	0.00*	1.00	0.00*
7							0.94	0.00*	0.00*
8								0.00*	0.00*
9									0.42

From the results presented in Table 3., it follows that there are statistically significant differences in values: a significant difference is, for example, between competences labeled as Code 8 (the teacher can develop the personality of the learner and their competences) and Code 9 (the teacher can identify the psychological and social factors of learner learning); also between competences labeled as Codes 8 and 10 (the teacher can identify the developmental and individual characteristics of the learner).

The obtained results are graphically represented in Figure 5. As it can be seen from the figure the respondents consider Code 1, 3, 4, 5, 7 and 8 to be more important. In less important terms, they consider the competences labeled as Codes 2, 6, 9 and 10. Thus, based on the reached score, the competences have been divided into 2 groups. The least important competence is considered by respondents the competence with Code 6 (the teacher can plan and carry out their professional development).

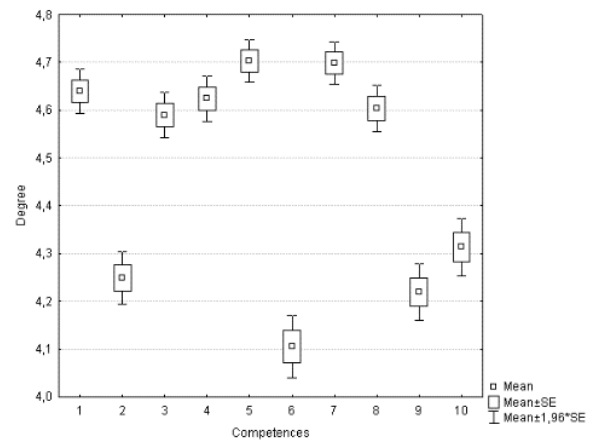


Figure 5. The importance of competences

In relation to the sustainable development of education and training, this competence should carefully be thought about. Only continuous professional teacher development can be a guarantee of a high level of the system of education. The low score has achieved the competence labeled as Code 9 (the teacher can identify the psychological and social factors of learner learning) and only a little higher score has achieved the competence with the Code 10 (the teacher can identify the developmental and individual characteristics of the learner). The latter two competences are very important as they are closely related to the development of learner's competences. We have been surprised that they have achieved such a low (compared to the other competences) score. The low score has also achieved the competence labeled as Code 2 (the teacher can use the material resources and aids in the teaching process). We have encountered this fact for a long time and are trying to change it. The current situation at schools, however is, that though material and technical resources and teaching aids the schools are equipped with has become much better from year to year, without continuous professional training of teachers, there is hardly anyone to work with the obtained resources and equipment. But, on the other hand, we have been pleased that the competence with Code 8 (the teacher can develop the personality of the learner and their competences) is one of those with higher scores.

## Conclusion

In the paper we have focused on analysis and evaluation of several aspects connected with teacher evaluation: the frequency of teacher evaluation (Figure 1.); the content of the evaluation (Figure 2. and Figure 3., Table 1a. and Table 1b.) and the considered level of importance of different competences (Figure 4., Figure 5., Table 2., Table 3.). We believe that in order to achieve a sustainable high level of education and training in Slovakia, it is necessary to pay increased attention to the development and evaluation of teacher's competences which will subsequently have impact on the development of the competences of their learners and will influence the quality of school education in general.

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