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Assessment Competence of Teaching Staff – a Factor in the Implementation of National Policy in the Field of School Competence Assessment

Kompetencje kadry nauczycielskiej w zakresie oceniania – czynnik warunkujący realizację polityki krajowej w zakresie oceniania kompetencji szkolnych

Introduction

Training of teachers is a key to progress, prestige and efficiency of any education system. Initial preparation cannot anticipate future developments or challenges, that is why intelligent, open, flexible sizing of lifelong learning pathways is required. A key priority within the evaluation and assessment framework is to develop indicators and measures of system performance that permit a good understanding of how well schooling is being delivered. Using these data, governments can analyse performance and identify priority areas

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for planning, intervention and policy. This typically entails the development of a system performance measurement framework (Nusche et al., 2013).

School evaluation is a widespread approach used in quality assurance across Europe. In 26 countries, both external and internal evaluation of schools is carried out. School evaluation is one possible method of quality assurance, which often coexists with other approaches, such as the monitoring of the entire education system or the evaluation of teachers (EC/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015).

The discussion may be continued by quoting a statement of the researchers who define “teachers’ assessment competence as a measurable cognitive disposition that is acquired by dealing with assessment demands in relevant educational situations and that enables teachers to master these demands quantifiably in a range of similar situations in a relatively stable and relatively consistent way” (Herppich et. al., 2018, p. 181).

Evaluators should be knowledgeable about instruction and well trained in the evaluation system, including the process of how to give productive feedback and how to support ongoing learning for teachers. As often as possible, and always at critical decision-making junctures, the evaluation team should include experts in the specific teaching field. Teacher evaluation should be based on professional teaching standards and should be sophisticated enough to assess teaching quality across the continuum of development from novice to expert teacher (Darling-Hammond, 2012).

A significant reform in the field of evaluation is the exclusion of grades at the primary level of education and the conceptualization of the *Criteria-based Assessment Through Descriptors Methodology* (CADM). In fact, the Republic of Moldova is the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to undertake a criteria-based assessment reform on a national scale (Marin et al., 2021). The initiative was conditioned by the Education Code, approved by the RM’s Parliament in October 2014, which clearly states in Article 16 (Paragraph 5) that “primary education shall envisage the assessment of learning results on the basis of criteria and through descriptors”, while Article 152 indicates that the “... assessment of the learning results through descriptors shall become effective in 2015, starting from grade 1” (Education Code, 2014).

As a result, in September 2015, the Criteria-based Assessment Through Descriptors (CAD) reform was introduced into primary education in the

Republic of Moldova. Assessment based on the marks of primary school students was replaced by judgements or descriptors of achievements that inform students about their learning progress and provide a guide for further success with regard to the earlier established criteria of assessment. The decision to abolish marks was grounded in the age characteristics of the primary level students scale (Marin et al., 2021).

Research Methodology

The purpose of the research lies in the analysis of the normative framework of the Republic of Moldova correlative with the international one in the field of school competence evaluation and the synthesis of theoretical values regarding the impact of training the evaluative competences of teaching staff on the evaluative process of students' competences.

To achieve the purpose, scientific documentation, comparison, interpretation, analysis, synthesis, generalization, and abstraction were used.

Theoretical Assumptions and Discussion

By bringing to attention the recent reforms regarding the school competence assessment in the Republic of Moldova, aspects and perspectives of training the teachers' assessment competences are necessary. The ideas that educational systems provide results are unanimously accepted insofar as the relevant bodies provide a normative framework framed on the imperatives of time.

We emphasize in this context that the debates about the assessment of school competences in primary education in the last decade have become a topic of public interest in our country. The promotion of the competence paradigm in the educational policy documents and the synchronization of the national system of education to the requirements of the time and to the European standards have directly conditioned the revision of the national normative framework in the field of school competence assessment.

Thus, after a period of consultation and debate, the *Education Code of the Republic of Moldova* (Republic of Moldova, 2014) has been adopted as a fundamental legislative normative act in the field of education at all levels. That act regulates all aspects of the legal relations and the functioning of the

national educational system, including the foundation of the process of school competence assessment in primary education.

According to the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2014), Article 26, primary education has the mission to “contribute to the formation of the child as a free and creative personality and to ensure the development of the necessary skills for the continuation of secondary education”. As we can see, school competences represent educational goals, the training/development of which depends on ensuring continuity between levels and cycles of education.

We highlight, in particular, the aspects regarding the evaluation and scoring scale established by the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2014), Article 27 (8): “Primary education ends with national testing organized on the basis of the methodology developed and approved by the Ministry of Education”. National testing serves as a means of assessing the level of development of students’ competences at the end of primary education, ISCED 1 (UIS, 2012).

Notably, Article 16 of the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2014), regarding the evaluation provides that: (1) The purpose of the evaluation is to orientate and optimize the learning; (5) In primary education, the evaluation of the learning results is based on criteria. The retrospective analysis of Education Law (Romania, 1995), Article 14 (1), denotes that “in educational institutions, the appreciation of knowledge is made by scores from 10 to 1 and by the ratings ‘passed’ or ‘failed’” versus the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2014), Article 16 (5), where “in primary education, the assessment of learning outcomes is based on criteria and is carried out through descriptors”. We notice that the researchers in the field and the decision-makers of the education system have opted for an evaluation of the learning results based on criteria carried out through descriptors.

Article 44 (1) is also relevant, of course, for reflecting the national reform undertaken in terms of assessing school competences: “the evaluation of school results aims to assess the level of development of students’ competences based on state educational standards” (Republic of Moldova, 2014). However, from the perspective of the evaluation, the performance standards represent the interface between the curriculum and the evaluation. In fact, the observance and modernization of Educational Standards is an essential

condition that would ensure the effectiveness and quality of the assessment of competences in primary education, according to Article 44 (1) (Republic of Moldova, 2014). Thus, the reorganization and connection of the education system within a significant and coherent conceptual framework determined the modernization of the Educational Standards in 2012. The revision of the standards was necessary to connect the fundamental objectives of education and training skills with the social dynamics and needs, aspects also specified in the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2014). Educational standards in accordance with Article 39 (1) of the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2014) “constitutes a set of normative documents and represents a system of criteria and norms regarding the level of quality to be achieved by various components and aspects of the educational system” (Pogolşa et al., 2012).

We highlight, in this context, Article 39 (2) section b), which states that “the state educational standards in general education aim at structuring in pupils the competences defined by the National Curriculum”, as well as paragraph (5) according to which “the state educational standards are the basis... for the objective assessment of the level of general training of the person, regardless of the type, place and form of accomplishment of the education” (Republic of Moldova, 2014). Researcher C. Cucuș (2008) confirms the evaluative character of educational standards by mentioning: “educational standards are evaluative norms built at macro-educational level, which synthesize the global requirements of education rendered in terms of general skills, but detectable at the level of educational processes and products”.

We mention, at the same time, that the educational standards of 2012 have a multi-aspectual character, targeting the basic aspects of the educational process – teaching, learning and evaluation, taking into account the necessary training and evaluation skills in each school subject. Educational standards represent the levels of instructive and educational capacity of pupils that they must reach at the end of the education stage (in this case, we refer to primary education, ISCED 1) (UIS, 2012). In practical terms, a current or final authentic evaluation cannot be conceived outside the educational standards, these being listed among the basic documents, elaborated at macro-educational level.

Another important stage in the modernization of the educational policy document is the National Curriculum, which represents the second generation of competence-centred curriculum (National Curriculum, 2018). The first

generation of competence-centred curriculum, as we recall, was developed and implemented in 2010 (Republic of Moldova, 2010).

In the context of promoting quality education, it has become inevitable to conceptualize and develop assessment tools related to learning efficiency standards. However, the fundamental problem faced by the educational system at a certain stage was the practical way in which the educational actors carried out the evaluation of school competences. Thus, we note that in 2014, the Referential for the Evaluation of the Specific Competences of the Students was created. Essentially, the referential is a structured system of criteria, benchmarks or indicators based on which the dimensions, components, content of a certain training profile, curriculum, education programme and profession are circumscribed. The experts emphasize that the evaluation referential ensures the transfer from traditional (decontextualized) for consistency only - based (integrative, authentic) evaluation and facilitates the design process of the evaluation. The basis of the evaluation, named in the standard (reference) specialized literature, must be reached by the student and includes structural components that determine the achievement of the object of the evaluation: the standards – the evaluation referential (criteria, indicators, descriptors) (Bucun, et al., 2014).

A significant documents for the issue under discussion, the reform of the assessment of school competences in the Republic of Moldova, is the Criteria-based Assessment through Descriptors Methodology. Drawn up on the basis of the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2014) (Article 16 Paragraph 5, Article 152 and Article 3), the respective methodologies aim to regulate the managerial and didactic actions regarding the implementation process of the evaluation through descriptors. The main change introduced by this reform in primary education is the replacement of the numerical scoring system with performance descriptors related to evaluation criteria announced before learning, implemented in all schools in the Republic of Moldova (Marin et al., 2018b).

In fact, the generalization of the results of the continuous monitoring of the process of implementation of the criteria-based assessment through descriptors in educational institutions, the discussions held with the teachers participating in the continuous training courses and the documents listed above led to the approval by the relevant ministry, in 2019, of the Criteria-based Assessment Through Descriptors in Primary School: Grades I-IV, Methodological

Guidebook (Repere metodologice privind asigurarea continuității la nivelul clasei a IV-a și a V-a din perspectiva implementării Evaluării Criteriale prin Descriptori (ECD)) (Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, 2019a).

Among the novelties of the *Criteria-based Assessment Through Descriptors in Primary School: Grades I-IV, Methodological Guidebook 2019*, we note:

- generalization of benchmarks regarding the organization process of the *criteria-based assessment through descriptors in primary school in grades I-IV* in the context of the curriculum for primary education;
- updating the lists of recommended products in school subjects in accordance with the provisions of the curriculum of subjects in primary education and following the continuity between classes;
- highlighting a list of recommended transdisciplinary products in various subjects and classes in order to ensure, at the level of the evaluation process, the transdisciplinary approaches promoted by the curriculum for primary education;
- streamlining the ways of processing and interpreting the evaluation data in school documents;
- reconfiguration of the table of students' school performances in a unitary structure for grades I-IV and in accordance with the provisions of the curriculum for primary education.

It is significant that this way of appreciation is promoted by the Criteria-based Assessment Through Descriptors in Primary School Methodology (CADM), in particular, the desideratum of the psycho-centrist paradigm, with sufficient formative valences in relation to the student. According to the CADM's authors, "the competence-based curriculum design ensures an optimal framework for evaluation to be carried out in the most authentic (real) situations, and the level of competence can be established on the basis of performance indicators organized around clear and transparent criteria" (Crudu & Gaiciuc, 2018b). This new evaluation system is conceived in the spirit of the new approaches to evaluation – as appreciation, as the issuance of value judgments about what the learners learned and how they learned and based on precise criteria that are well established in advance and related to the individual performance descriptors.

The representative document aimed at reforming the evaluation of school competences in primary education in the Republic of Moldova is the Methodological Benchmarks on Ensuring Continuity at the Level of the

Fourth and Fifth Grade from the Perspective of Implementing the Evaluation Based on Criteria Through Descriptors. The paper aims to provide educational actors with support in ensuring continuity between educational levels. However, the transition from primary to secondary education is an essential change for students, and to successfully overcome it, it requires combined actions of all factors involved in education, which leave a mark on students' psyche. According to the authors of the methodology (Marin & Gaiciuc, 2018): "ensuring continuity in the implementation of the criteria-based assessment through descriptors at the level of the fourth and fifth grade will have effective adaptation effects of the fifth-grade students, contribute to the development of their personality and guarantee the achievement of curricular goals expressed through school skills if the emphasis of the steps is on the possibility of adapting the teachers and managers in the secondary level to a generation of students who for four years have been learning without grades, applying the criteria-based assessment through descriptors paradigm".

Essentially, it is not surprising that the socio-economic transformations that took place in the Republic of Moldova in the last decades have imposed radical changes in the educational system by modifying the value guidelines of the school and conceptualizing the new documents of educational policies correlative to the evaluation process. In fact, currently, the process of evaluating school competences in primary education is based on educational policy documents, developed as a result of the reforms undertaken in the last decade.

In addition, the analysis of the normative framework shows that the process of evaluating school competences in primary education cannot be done outside the code of ethics of the teaching staff (Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, 2016 b). The major idea stipulated in the aforementioned document is that, in relations with students/children, the managers, teachers and auxiliary teachers are obliged to observe the rules of conduct, except for the traffic of influence and favouritism in the training and evaluation processes.

Summarising, the national regulatory framework in the field of school competence assessment includes educational policy documents (see Figure 1).

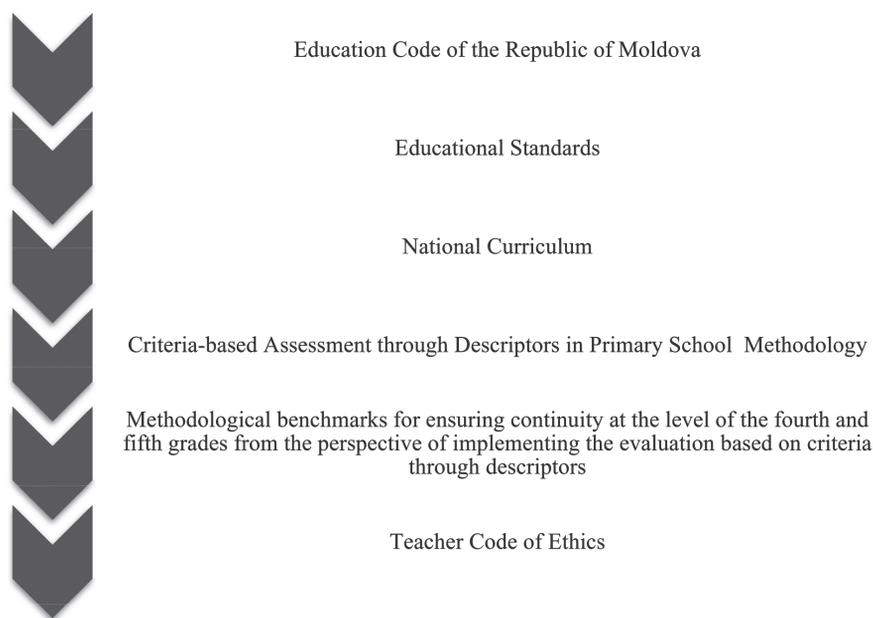


Figure 1. Normative framework for the evaluation of school competences in primary education.

The basic idea is that the evolution directions of the reform of the evaluation of school competences in the primary education in the Republic of Moldova also undoubtedly involve the training of teachers in the field of evaluation of pupils' school results. It is an essential condition for the integration into the quality education system at national and European level.

Thus, an important reference system for the teacher performance level self-assessment in general education in the Republic of Moldova is the Standards of Professional Competence of Teachers (Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, 2016 a). The standards are the basic requirements that the teacher must demonstrate, being always open and motivated to professional development and the achievement of superior performance.

Each teacher, knowing the standards, will be able to identify the strengths of his/her professional profile, as well as the areas of professional development that require continuous improvements, including the aspect of evaluation of school results. The standards are the reference framework for the continuous development of professional competences in relation to educational needs,

existing trends, motivation of self-training and the realization of quality teaching activities.

Regarding the evaluative competence of teachers, we specify that the Standards of Professional Competence of Teachers in General Education, approved by the Order of the Ministry of Education and Research no. 1124 of July 20, 2018, stipulate, as a performance indicator in the field of evaluation of school results, the teacher evaluating and providing reverse connections in order to increase performance. This indicator specifies the need for the teacher to achieve/demonstrate the following aspects/descriptors (Figure 2).

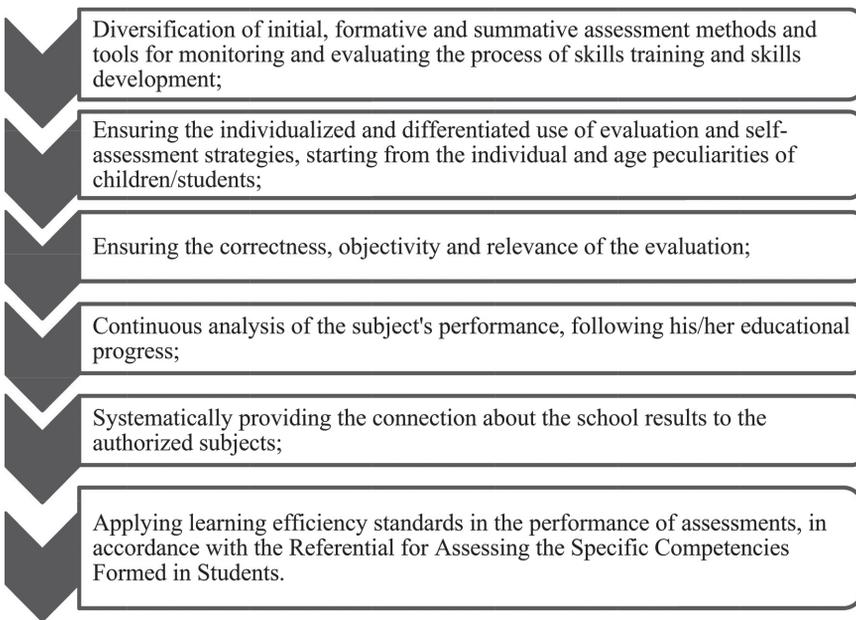


Figure 2. Descriptors related to teachers' professional competence standards descriptors.

Namely, this system of indicators and descriptors configures the meaning of the concept of evaluative competence of teachers on which the Standards of Professional Competence of Teachers in General Education in the Republic of Moldova are based. Of course, the didactic process of forming the evaluative competence of the teachers is unthinkable without respecting and highlighting the principles of andragogy (science and practice of adult education) on

which it is based. The andragogical model of education aims at the following principles:

- The formable holds the main role in the process of its formation.
- The formable tends towards self-realization, independence, and self-management and is considered capable of this.
- The adult's life experience can be an important source of learning both for him/her and for his/her colleagues.
- The adult learns to solve his/her problems and achieve his/her goals.
- The adult tends to apply the acquired knowledge, skills and competences immediately in practice during the learning process.
- The adult's learning activity is largely determined by professional, social, time and space factors that prevent or favour this process.
- The formable adult participates with the trainer in all stages of the learning process: planning, implementation and evaluation (Poştan, 2016).

As a result, the prerogative of the reform of the primary education school competence evaluation is the formation of the evaluative skills of teachers, stipulated by the standards of professional competence of teachers in general education. In essence, a change in the system begins “with the serious training of teachers” (Marin, 2015). In this context, we note that the Institute of Education Sciences in the country has developed the curriculum for the training of trainers and teachers for the implementation of the reform in the evaluation of the dimension of criteria-based assessment through descriptors methodology. We emphasize that the programme of training teachers in the field of the criteria-based assessment through descriptors in primary education was based on the Education Code the first document carried out in accordance with the reforms undertaken. The courses focused on students' awareness of the need to move from traditional to modern assessment, highlighting the process assessment achievable through criteria and descriptors.

In developing the themes of the continuous training courses of the Criteria-Based Assessment Through Descriptors, the following were considered:

- the topicality of the topics in relation to the contemporary trends of European/world educational policies;
- appropriateness of the assessment to the competence-centred paradigm;
- ensuring an optimal balance between theoretical approaches, themes of reflection and applicative themes;

- real possibilities of application by modelling the didactic situations of the criteria-based assessment through descriptors (Marin, 2015).

Continuous training courses aimed to familiarize teachers who teach in grades I-IV with aspects related to:

1. the implementation of the CADM at the level of long- and short-term didactic projects, as well as at the level of the didactic approach itself in the class of students;
2. participation in professional development activities within continuous training institutions and at local and institutional levels with a view to implement the CADM;
3. organisation of parenting and counselling activities on the CADM.

Conclusions

Despite certain socio-economic problems, the Republic of Moldova has made progress in modernizing the legislative and normative educational framework, with obvious repercussions also on the field of school competence assessment, as proven by the documents previously examined, the training of trainers and teachers on the implementation of the criteria-based assessment through descriptors in primary school methodology. We deduce that the development and implementation of the recent educational policy documents ensure the effective functioning of the educational system in terms of skills assessment, as well as the alignment with European and international good practices. The evolution directions of these positive transformations are, in our opinion, a result of the investigation of educational praxis and an investigation corroborated with theoretical acquisitions in the field of education sciences.

However, according to the standards of professional competence of teachers in the general education of the year 2016, the formation of evaluative competence is a performance indicator in the field of evaluation of school results and must be treated in many aspects, the training of teachers being imperative. Therefore, the successful start of the evaluation process reform requires the formation of the evaluative competence of the teachers in agreement with the indicator specifying the need for the teacher to demonstrate all the descriptors mentioned above in Figure 2. It is an essential condition for integration into the quality education system. It is, therefore, necessary to pay more attention to the

teachers' training in the field of school competence assessment in continuous training courses, in line with modern trends, as part of the educational system, together with teaching and learning.

However, evaluation is a fundamental operational component of the educational process. It is the regulating and self-regulating element of reverse connection in the educational system seen as a cybernetic system. This element of the "teaching-learning-evaluation" system informs the actors of the educational field about the effectiveness of the didactic technology, the achievement of the educational goals, and the social significance of the school results, respectively.

Prospects for Further Research

In order to ensure the quality of the evaluation of school competences in primary education, the following is necessary at the level of research as well as implementation:

- the diversification of assessment technologies and the increase of their suitability to specific didactic situations by opening the assessment to more perspectives of the school space (relational competences, teacher-student communication, availability of social integration possibilities);
- the creation and valorisation of an interpretation mechanism (methodology) of the school results obtained within the national evaluations against the educational standards, which would allow ensuring continuity at the level of education levels;
- revision of the educational normative framework with reference to the digital assessment of school skills;
- an intervention within the continuous professional training process, at the national level, regarding the training of the evaluative skills of primary education teachers due to the fact that evaluative practice cannot change for the better in the absence of a solid legislative-normative framework, and teachers must be given the necessary support to develop their evaluative competence in accordance with contemporary national and European normative regulations.

Abstract: The article addresses the issue of assessment competences of teachers in the context of the reform undertaken in the Republic of Moldova at the level of educational policies related to the school competence assessment. The article examines the national normative framework; the educational policy documents underlying the assessment process in primary education are mentioned and analysed. The descriptors to be demonstrated by the teachers in the classroom assessment process, as well as the principles of andragogy, are listed here. The objective of this article is to analyse the main achievements of the national educational system at the level of educational documents and highlight the importance of training the assessment competences of teachers as an essential factor in increasing students' performance.

Keywords: assessment, assessment criteria, descriptor, standard, teachers' assessment competence, professional competence

Streszczenie: Artykuł omawia kwestię kompetencji nauczycieli w zakresie oceniania w kontekście reformy przyjętej w Republice Mołdawii na poziomie polityki oświatowej związanej z oceną kompetencji szkolnych. W artykule zbadano krajowe ramy normatywne oraz wymieniono i przeanalizowano dokumenty polityki oświatowej leżące u podstaw procesu oceniania w szkolnictwie podstawowym. Wymieniono w nim deskryptory, którymi powinni wykazać się nauczyciele w procesie oceny klasy, a także zasady andragogiki. Celem artykułu jest analiza głównych osiągnięć krajowego systemu edukacji na poziomie dokumentów oświatowych oraz podkreślenie znaczenia prowadzenia szkoleń dotyczących kompetencji nauczycieli w zakresie oceniania jako istotnego czynnika sprzyjającego poprawie wyników uczniów.

Słowa kluczowe: ocenianie, kryteria oceniania, deskryptor, standard, kompetencje nauczycieli w zakresie oceniania, kompetencje zawodowe

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