

From Basic Skills to Pedagogical Competence: Is the Terminology of Competence Clearly Defined?

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Abstract: This paper investigates the evolution and development of the concept of pedagogical competence, with a specific focus on its role within the educational system. Through an extensive literature review, spanning works from 1945 to 2024, we analyze the origins of the term competence, tracing it back to ancient Greece and its subsequent transformation into a key concept in modern educational theory. Emphasis is placed on the development and classification of pedagogical competence, its relationship to various pedagogical skills, and the importance of teachers' roles in educational processes. The study highlights the necessity for a clear, unified definition of pedagogical competence and presents a proposed definition that encapsulates its multidimensional nature, grounded in both national and international perspectives. Through a comparative analysis of existing research, this study aims to refine the understanding of pedagogical competence and provide a solid foundation for further research and development.

Keywords: pedagogical competence, pedagogical skills, competence, educational system, teacher roles, competency framework, literature review, comparative analysis

Od základních dovedností k pedagogickým kompetencím: Je terminologie kompetencí jasně definována?

Abstrakt: Tato práce zkoumá vývoj konceptu pedagogické kompetence, se specifickým zaměřením na její roli v rámci vzdělávacího systému. Prostřednictvím rozsáhlé literární rešerše, zahrnující díla z období od roku 1945 do roku 2024, analyzujeme původ pojmu kompetence, sledujeme jeho kořeny ve starověkém Řecku a následnou proměnu v klíčový pojem moderní teorie vzdělávání. Důraz je kladen na vývoj a klasifikaci pedagogické kompetence, její vztah k pedagogickým dovednostem a na význam role učitelů ve vzdělávacích procesech. Studie zdůrazňuje nutnost jasného a jednotného uchopení pedagogické kompetence a navrhuje její definici, která zachycuje její multidimenzionální povahu, zakotvenou v národních i mezinárodních perspektivách. Prostřednictvím komparativní analýzy stávajícího výzkumu se tato studie snaží zpřesnit porozumění pedagogické kompetence a poskytnout pevný základ pro další výzkum.

Klíčová slova: pedagogická kompetence, pedagogické dovednosti, kompetence, vzdělávací systém, role učitelů, kompetenční rámec, přehledová studie, komparativní analýza

The academic pedagogical community employs several terms in the context of curriculum development (Eurydice, 2015), establishing various strategies at institutional, regional, national, and, most importantly, international levels that influence all participants in educational processes, whether they are pupils, students, teachers, or lecturers (Walterová, 2004). It is widely recognized that society engages in lifelong learning, which begins at birth and continues until death (Staněk, 2009). When considering formal learning within curricular systems, the teacher holds significant responsibility for an individual's education, particularly in the case of a child's education in pre-primary school and

subsequently within the continuous schooling system at the primary, secondary, or tertiary levels (European Commission, 2000). Teachers are accountable for the smooth execution of educational processes within specific lessons at the institutional level, achieved through the successful acquisition and ongoing development of their pedagogical competence, which enables them to perform this role effectively (Weinert, 2001). In this context, Hattie (2003) emphasizes the importance of research in the field of competencies, arguing that the positive development of teachers, particularly with regard to pedagogical competence, is foundational to the teaching profession.

1 Methodology and Purpose of the Study

In the paper we focus on the analysis of a series of works published and selected for the chosen period. Classified as a literature review based on Mareš (2013), this study introduces a range of works, including research, in the field of pedagogical competencies and skills, examining their origins, development, and classification at both national (e.g., Czech) and international levels. To ensure that the literature review remains current and relevant to the academic community, we have carefully selected works spanning from 1945 to the present, i.e., up to the year 2024. While we acknowledge the development of pedagogical competencies in the current territory of the Czech Republic since 1918, as well as the initial efforts to establish a standardized competency framework (Rýdl, 2010), we believe that focusing on the period from 1945 onwards, i.e., post-World War II, will provide a review that is not predominantly associated with the conflict.

To offer a comprehensive literature review from a holistic perspective, we also examine the origins of the terminology and utilize national-level works in a comparative context to demonstrate the evolution of the concept of competence. We recognize that such evolution can only be effectively demonstrated through comparisons with literature that extends beyond the set period. For this reason, the section *From Arete to Ability: Origins of the Competence and its Transformation* is not confined to a specific timeframe, allowing us to explore the development and origins of the terminology and the earliest references to the term.

The purpose of this study is to introduce current trends in education concerning the development of competencies from a holistic perspective. In this context, the paper reviews existing studies and research, highlighting cases that deviate from current educational trends by identifying both similarities and differences observed in recent national and international research and other relevant works. We acknowledge that a literature review inherently involves comparative analysis, and thus we include the outcomes of our review. With this in mind, another objective of this literature review is to propose or refine a suitable definition of the term pedagogical competence, allowing us to narrow the range of differing definitions currently in use.

2 From Arete to Ability: The Origins of Competence and Its Transformation

The development of terminology related to pedagogical competence can be compared to a living organism in constant evolution. This evolution suggests that a single term does not conclude with a universally accepted definition (Sergeeva et al., 2019), as the general and academic communities in education undergo continuous development across several dimensions and are influenced by demographic, cultural, technological, economic, and political factors (Oyenuga et al., 2021). The dynamics of this evolution over time are also reflected in the nuanced meanings of three seemingly similar terms: competence, competency, and competencies (Khasanova, 2024; R. Yuvaraj, 2011).

Sergeeva et al. (2019) state that the concept of competence can be traced back to ancient Greece, specifically to Aristotle. Although Aristotle elaborates on the term *arete*, which refers to excellence achievable from a fundamental starting point (Finkelberg, 2002), the foundational idea already appears in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, where he effectively describes the idea of superiority

or nobility that can be attained (Jaeger, 1945). From this perspective, one could argue that the force originating from a fundamental point can, through various stages, develop and eventually reach a state of excellence or realize a dimension in which further development is possible (Briggs, 2007; Sergeeva et al., 2019). This historical perspective helps identify the period from which the roots of the concept of competence date.

By the 19th century, the term competence had already been introduced, although it carried different meanings from the way it is perceived today. Malý and Rieger (1886) introduced the term to the general public within a legal context rather than an educational one. In their terminology, competence is associated with affiliation to political institutions or other entities. Similarly, Otto's dictionaries (1899, 1903) do not reference any further distinctions that would connect the term specifically to personal development or pedagogical studies.

In a narrow sense, the term competence in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as evidenced by selected dictionaries (Malý & Rieger, 1886; Otto, 1899, 1903), indicated political affiliation. From a broader perspective, however, it referred to the capability or ability to perform a task. This broader definition of the term persists in the works of J. A. Comenius (*Komenského slovník naučný*, 1938), where competence is connected to an ability that must be learned within a particular environment, specifically within an educational system (Polz et al., 1929).

The rise of the term competence in the educational context is notably introduced by Chomsky (1965), where competence is perceived as central to education and the capacity to be educated. Although Chomsky's work represents one of the earliest attempts to define linguistic competence accurately, it established a stable foundation for further research and elaboration.

From arete to ability, the term competence has undergone significant transformation. Notably, in addition to the term's introduction into education on a linguistic basis, the space exploration initiatives in the United States in 1958 began a refinement of the terms competence and competency. From the 1970s onwards, the concept of competence, including core competence, became widely used in the United States (Sergeeva et al., 2019).

3 Pedagogical Skills as the Foundation of Pedagogical Competence

In the field of education, it can be asserted that the quality of the teacher or educator significantly influences the overall quality of the educational system, regardless of whether the institution is classified within the private or public sector (Aqylah & Jarkawi, 2021). More importantly, a teacher who thoroughly understands the content of their subject, effectively manages lessons, is proactive and communicative, motivates students, and employs various methods to address classroom dynamics and learner needs, thereby demonstrating mastery of pedagogical competencies, positively influences the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning environment (Lumbantobing, 2020).

Throughout a student's educational journey, the teacher has an undeniable impact on the quality of their learning and their sense of self-efficacy (Wilson et al., 2014). This impact is largely determined by the quality of the teacher, which is, in turn, derived from their successful mastery of pedagogical competence, a concept considered inseparable from the practice of education (Nezvalová, 2003).

To accurately define the term pedagogical competence, it is necessary to further explore what it encompasses and, more specifically, what it is composed of. As discussed above, competence, in its original sense, can be understood as an action or educational ability (Chomsky, 1965) that comprises a number of key components or skills. In this context, pedagogical competence is constructed from several pedagogical skills (Rahman et al., 2020) that collectively form this specific competence. For example, in the development of one's communication competence, as described by Arskieva et al. (2024), it is necessary to perform several specific actions or skills to achieve it.

The concept of action, understood as a component of competence, specifically a skill, is formally defined as an elementary driving force that facilitates the formation of complex action

structures known as competences (Průcha et al., 2013). Generally, a skill is considered an action by which one can successfully complete a task (Bažantová et al., 2014). However, a skill is not defined solely in general terms because it also includes subsystems and specific features such as individual abilities, habits, character traits, and knowledge. The development of a specific skill, in this case, pedagogical skill, presupposes a certain level of individual aptitude and quality (Průcha et al., 2013).

From a deductive perspective, a skill defined as an action can be further classified into intellectual, sensorimotor, communicative, social, and occupational categories. Moreover, each action within a specific activity may possess unique characteristics, such as those observed in pedagogical skills (Bažantová et al., 2014). Kyriacou (2008) elaborates on pedagogical skills, noting that each skill is distinct and encompasses a broad range of actions, from general tasks like preparing for a lesson to more specific tasks such as the precise measurement of the duration of individual activities within a teaching unit.

4 Classification of Pedagogical Skills

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, academic research undertook initiatives that further elaborated on the concept of pedagogical skill (Juanda et al., 2024; Rahman et al., 2020; Amaliah, 2024). It can be stated that when a skill involves more than a single, direct action and requires a higher level of coordination among multiple cognitive or sensory processes (Chomsky, 1965), it is classified as a higher-order skill. Such skills extend into areas of pedagogical, psychological, philosophical, sociological, or other relevant dimensions (Švec, 1998). As Švec (1998) also notes, and as observed in the research of other respected authorities in the field such as Kolář et al. (2001), Kyriacou (2008), and Podlahová (2012), the predominant pedagogical skill that forms the foundation for the development of potential competence is didactic skill.

Table 1. Classification of Pedagogical Skills Based on Acquaintance With First-, Second-, and Third-Order Skills

Acquaintance of First-Order Skills	Pedagogical skills related to the qualification of main subject that a teacher acquired during comprehensive studies, such as language skills, productive artistic skills, musical skills, etc.
Acquaintance of Second-Order Skills	Refers to psychodidactic skills, where first-order skills are transformed by the teacher into an appropriate form for pupils and students, ensuring alignment with pedagogical and psychological principles that support skill acquisition.
Acquaintance of Third-Order Skills	Refers to the acquisition of selected skills from qualification of minor subjects by the teacher, where these skills are derived from the previous two orders (i.e., first and second-order skills).

Source: Adopted from Švec (1998).

The author emphasizes the importance of acquiring competence in two subjects, where both major and minor subject qualifications are developed. This dual qualification enhances teachers' ability to advance their pedagogical skills in accordance with established categories. Kolář et al. (2001) stress the necessity of continually acquiring pedagogical skills, not only during initial studies but also throughout one's career, particularly during professional development as a teacher. Furthermore, another aspect of skill development emerges through curricular interactions, especially in teacherstudent dynamics (Nelešovská, 2002). In this context, the author underscores the importance

of skills related to building connections with students, recognizing emotional states within the learning environment, anticipating potential emotional imbalances or outcomes, maintaining effective and respectful communication, and incorporating students' perspectives when addressing complex issues.

The importance of acquiring competence in two subjects is emphasized from the author's perspective, where both major and minor subject qualifications contribute to the development of essential skills. In this regard, it can be argued that qualifications in two subjects functionally enhance teachers' capacity to advance their pedagogical skills according to established categories. Kolář et al. (2001) underscore the need for the cyclical acquisition of pedagogical skills not only during initial studies but also after graduation and throughout a teacher's professional development. Additionally, it is important to note that another dimension of skill development emerges through curricular interaction, particularly in teacher-student dynamics (Nelešovská, 2002). In this context, the author emphasizes skills related to building relationships (teacher-student interactions), recognizing the emotional states of individuals within the curriculum, anticipating potential emotional imbalances or outcomes, maintaining effective and respectful communication, and incorporating students' perspectives when addressing challenging issues.

Table 2. Classification of Pedagogical Skills From the Perspective of Dialogue Between Curricular Knowledge and Abilities in the Educational System

Teaching and Subject Mastery Skills	Skills related to mastering teaching units with a focus on subject-specific didactics and the ability to implement students' experiences into the teaching process.
Motivation and Engagement Skills	Skills to recognize the level of student motivation and positively influence it.
Assessment and Evaluation Skills	Skills for involvement in complex assessment processes.
Conceptual and Practical Knowledge of Teaching	Skills based on conceptual knowledge of teaching (teaching approach, teaching model) and their subsequent application, along with knowledge of students and their qualities.
Cooperation and Communication Skills	Skills and knowledge related to student cooperation in the learning process, along with skills to transform monologic teaching into dialogic teaching.
Understanding the Teacher's Role and Responsibilities	Knowledge of the teacher's role, responsibilities, and the nature of work.

Source: Adopted from Kolář et al. (2001).

In Table 2, it is evident that the research has increasingly focused on more specific aspects of the curriculum and the precise implementation of teaching practices. In this context, the skills identified are more closely related to individual activities within the teaching unit, such as assessment, motivation, and knowledge of responsibilities (Kolář et al., 2001), rather than the development of broader, higher-level skills (Švec, 1998).

A synthesis of the perspectives from the previously cited authors (Švec, 1998; Kolář et al., 2001) can be observed in Kyriacou's (2008) classification of pedagogical skills. The author identifies two elements, with the first described as the static element and the second as the dynamic element.

Table 3. Classification of Pedagogical Skills Based on the Static and Dynamic Elements Theory

Static Element of Pedagogical Skills	A broad spectrum of knowledge ranging from foundational insights related to the studied field, understanding of students and their specific needs for the comprehensive fulfilment of educational goals, comprehensive knowledge of the curriculum, expertise in teaching methodologies, awareness of various factors influencing the educational cycle, and knowledge of one's own pedagogical skills and self-awareness.
Dynamic Element of Pedagogical Skills	Continuous and flexible decision-making and reflection throughout the preparation of a teaching unit. This element of skills is primarily concerned with the phases before (preparation), during (implementation), and after (reflection) the teaching unit, where the crucial objective is to achieve the highest possible level of outcomes and fulfilment of the established goals within the educational unit.

Source: Adopted from Kyriacou (2008)

The distinction between static and dynamic elements further clarifies how students perceive actions and activities within a specific lesson led by the teacher. This dual classification, with an emphasis on the dynamic element, is also evident in research conducted by Gillernová et al. (2012), which extends the definition of action skills in close association with pedagogical competencies. The importance of dynamic pedagogical action skills is highlighted, as the presence of action within a lesson is essential and serves as a foundation for the development of complex pedagogical competencies (Nelešová, 2002; Kyriacou, 2008; Gillernová et al., 2012).

5 Defining the Terminology of Competence

The term competence has undergone significant development since the period of Ancient Greece (Finkelberg, 2002), evolving in the 1950s when it was understood as a structural and cognitive tendency (Savignon, 2005). Its classifications were further elaborated in the early 21st century (Mareš & Gavora, 1999; Vašutová, 2002; Vašutová, 2004; Bažantová et al., 2014), culminating, within the context of curricular research and development in the Czech Republic, in the first publication of the Competence Framework for Graduates of Pedagogical Programs at Higher Education Institutions by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT, 2023).

The term pedagogical competence is also not consistently defined from a holistic point of view (Khasanova, 2024), as various researchers identify differences in the usage of the term competence (R. Yuvaraj, 2011). These subtle differences, based on varying terminologies, fragment a unified definition and add layers of complexity to the ongoing research into its meaning.

What further complicates the unification of the term competence is its frequent, and sometimes incorrect, interchangeability with competency. Some researchers use these terms synonymously (Wong, 2020). In this context, competence is typically associated with task-oriented actions aimed at achieving specific outcomes (Burgoyne, 1989; Wong, 2020), whereas competency is more people-oriented, focusing on the description of personal attributes (R. Yuvaraj, 2011).

6 Pedagogical Competence and Its Classification

The teacher in a school system serves as a model, undoubtedly taking on the responsibility of facilitating action within higher education institutions and the curricular environment (Nezvalová, 2003). In this sense, competence, understood as action-based motion, is executed within a curricular system. In the context of curricular agendas, it is rare to assert that the term pedagogical competence refers solely to the ability to perform high-quality operations, as it also closely relates to the educational and training aspects grounded in acquired knowledge and abilities (Bažantová et al., 2014). An important criterion appears to be continuous development, beginning during university studies and continuing after successful graduation, as teachers work full-time (Bažantová et al., 2014; Průcha et al., 2013).

Koetsier et al. (1996) classifies initial pedagogical competencies into three categories, encompassing the teacher's activities, personality, and didactic and research abilities, all of which reflect pedagogical action.

Table 4. Three-Section Classification of Pedagogical Competencies

Triggering Competencies	These competencies focus primarily on the effective implementation of teaching by encompassing essential pedagogical skills related to the preparation, execution, and evaluation of lessons.
Developmental Competencies	These competencies emphasize the personal and professional growth of educators, being grounded in self-reflection, which enables teachers to critically assess their own teaching practices, identify areas for improvement, and work towards continuous professional development.
Research Competencies	These competencies focus on the systematic analysis of teaching activities, where educators treat their teaching practice as a research process, using insights from this analysis to refine and enhance their instructional methods.

Source: Adopted from Koetsier et al. (1996)

The author proposes a range of activities that must be synchronized to effectively manage the teacher's workload. However, this classification appears to be rather broad and requires further elaboration. Parallels can be drawn with Koetsier et al. (1996), as Nezvalová (2003) similarly proposes a three-part classification for future teachers.

Table 5. Adaptation of the Three-Section Classification of Pedagogical Competencies

Management Competencies	These competencies focus on planning, successfully delivering instruction, monitoring, and evaluating the teaching process.
Self-management Competencies	These competencies are directed toward the individual professional development of educators. In this context, self-management competencies can be defined as the development of oneself with the goal of improving work quality and contributing to team collaboration.
Specialized Competencies	These competencies encompass the theoretical foundations for mastering specific subjects, all types of subject-specific skills, and a value system for applying, integrating, and utilizing knowledge in an interdisciplinary context.

Source: Adopted from Nezvalová (2003)

Both Table 4 and Table 5 exhibit undeniable parallels in the classification of specific pedagogical competencies. The main point of divergence, however, lies in the final section of both tables. While Koetsier et al. (1996) emphasizes the need for further academic research and elaboration in teaching, Nezvalová (2003) focuses on grounding competencies within individual subjects and advocates for interdisciplinary collaboration and sharing.

7 A Proposal for a Unified Terminology of Pedagogical Competence

With the foundational knowledge outlined above, it becomes evident that defining the core elements of pedagogical skills is nearly as complex as defining competencies themselves (Švec, 1998; Kyriacou, 2008; Wong, 2020). Pedagogical competencies can be understood as an overarching set that includes these skills. Given the various interpretations of pedagogical competencies as a combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge essential for educators, we build on the work of Vašutová (2002) and Podlahová (2012) to present a definition that provides a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of pedagogical competence. For the purposes of this study, we propose the following definition of pedagogical competence.

Pedagogical competence encompasses a spectrum of highly specialized disciplinary knowledge, practical understanding, attitudes, and experiences that contribute positively to solidarity and equality. It includes a comprehensive set of pedagogical skills that reflect:

1. Educational systems (i.e., selected pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels) across the full breadth of the curriculum;
2. Forms of education that influence the learner population (i.e., selected children, pupils, and students), with the goal of maximizing their intellectual and personal potential, individual interests, and personal and educational needs.

This definition suggests that pedagogical competence is not merely a complex structure of pedagogical actions but rather a set of pedagogical skills that form the foundation of pedagogical competence. As proposed, pedagogical competence can be further elaborated and classified into specific competencies. Based on this definition, we believe that the terminology now has a

comprehensive and objective foundation, anchoring the term in a way that can undergo further research on both qualitative and quantitative bases.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the complexity and evolving nature of pedagogical competence, which is foundational to the teaching profession. The literature reviewed demonstrates the long historical trajectory of the term competence and its adaptation within the educational context. Pedagogical competence, as defined in this study, consists of a broad set of specialized skills, knowledge, and attitudes essential for effective teaching across all levels of education. The classification of pedagogical skills into various orders and types, as examined through the work of multiple scholars, reinforces the need for a holistic approach to understanding teacher competence. By proposing a unified definition of pedagogical competence, this paper addresses the fragmentation of current terminologies and offers a clearer conceptual framework for future research. The continuous professional development of teachers is crucial, not only to enhance their pedagogical skills but also to improve educational outcomes for students. Further research, both qualitative and quantitative, is necessary to validate and expand upon the proposed definition, ensuring that it remains relevant in an ever-changing educational landscape.

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