

Foreword

In the last few decades, education experts and decision-makers have been focused on issues concerning the teaching profession, professionalism, the need for the professionalisation of the teacher's calling, and the development of quality education. The quality of teaching is the decisive factor in the quality of education, with education and continuing professional development of teachers undeniably being among the central issues relevant for the realisation, quality, dissemination, and innovation of educational activities. The professional development of teachers is understood as a lifelong learning and development process in the personal, social, and narrow professional fields, whereby it is important how the teacher views his/her competencies and how he/she assesses the opportunities for professional action in the direction of critical, independent, and responsible decision-making and action. Within the framework of the research project 13. 10. 2. 2. 02, *Teachers' professional development: status, personality and transversal competencies* (Croatian title: *Profesionalni razvoj učitelja: status, ličnost i transverzalne kompetencije*), which was approved and funded by the University of Rijeka, the researchers focused on three main concepts that are key to the effective and modern professional development of teachers: teacher status, personality, and professional competencies in developing pupils' transversal competencies in educational practice. To date, educational practice has paid little attention to these questions, and scientific literature lacks comprehensive studies.

Although the teaching profession has changed significantly over the last few decades, it still has to define itself in relation to other professions. Teachers often find themselves in the midst of the high expectations of society (and probably their own expectations as well) and low professional reputation. Many international reports and studies warn that the role of teachers is becoming increasingly demanding and complex, while, on the other hand, their status in society is stagnating or even decreasing compared to other professions. The modern teacher works in an inclusive educational environment comprising children with different educational needs, while transversal competencies (such as "learning to learn", sustainability, and inclusive teaching) place before teachers the demand for the development of higher levels of knowledge and more complex cognitive skills. Teachers are thus required to possess a new level of responsibility, as they must help children to fulfil their creative potential for the benefit of not only their personal development, but also that of the societies they belong to. Transversal competencies for lifelong learning, which are the very foundation of creativity, innovation, critical thinking, or entrepreneurship, are considered to be crucial for the realisation of social goals that are important to all individuals.

Bearing in mind all of the above, the purpose of this research was to explore the experiences and attitudes of elementary classroom teachers and subject teachers from the Republic of Croatia and Republic of Slovenia towards professional development and status, and their personality and transversal competencies in the areas of self-regulation, inclusion, and sustainable development. The research survey included a total of 1,867 teachers who correctly completed the entire questionnaire: 1,103 (59.1%) Croatian and 764 (40.9%) Slovenian elementary school teachers.

As a result of a team effort of researchers and associates from the Faculty of Teacher Education in Rijeka and the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, a scientific monograph was published in the Croatian language within the framework of the same-named scientific research project in 2017. With the help of the obtained right from the University of Rijeka Foundation and Scientific Foundation of Faculty of Arts from University of Ljubljana to co-finance publishing activities in 2017, we were also able to publish the English and Slovenian translations of the said scientific monograph, which was one of the project goals given that this is a cross-cultural study.

This edition of the scientific monograph contains four main chapters.¹ In addition to the theoretical insights, each chapter provides empirically based findings on the focal topic. The measurement characteristics of all applied instruments and the results obtained in the Slovenian and Croatian subsamples are described in the chapters of the monograph. The *Introduction* theoretically positions the conducted empirical research and points to the fundamental methodological starting points of the scientific research project. The second chapter, *Teachers' professional development: Context, perspectives, and challenges*, provides a theoretical-conceptual framework based on a review of scientifically relevant knowledge on the professional development of teachers. The basic conceptual definitions and key features of the dominant approaches to professional development are emphasised, and special attention is given to contemporary views that highlight some of the perspectives that give rise to new interpretations and fundamental characteristics of professional development. The third chapter, *Reputation of the teacher and the teaching profession: views from within*, is devoted to the analysis of factors that reflect the position and status of the teaching profession. Different approaches are considered regarding the definition of status and the problems of non-recognition of the teaching profession, and various implications

1 Pursuant to the decision of the Board of Directors of the University of Rijeka Foundation (class 612-10/17-01/17; contract number - N-IZ 8/2017), the right was obtained to co-finance the translation of the printed version into English and Slovenian that does not include two chapters published in the Croatian university edition under the approved title *Profesionalni razvoj učitelja: status, ličnost i transverzalne kompetencije*.

are analysed aimed at improving teachers' position within the profession and society. In the fourth chapter, *Teachers' professional competencies as predictors of teacher beliefs about self-regulated learning* are discussed as important transversal competencies that have gained prominence with the proposal of the new Croatian curriculum, which has introduced the cross-curricular topic "learning to learn". Teacher attitudes and beliefs about the importance of self-regulated learning largely determine their readiness to introduce activities and organise teaching incentives for the development of the self-regulated learning competency. Such attitudes and beliefs are formed during pre-service and in-service teacher education; therefore, it would be interesting to find out to what extent are their self-estimates of professional competency associated with positive beliefs about the importance of encouraging self-regulated learning in pupils. Finally, in the fifth chapter, *Teachers' professional competencies for individualised instruction in inclusive classrooms*, special attention is devoted to the inclusive education policy and teacher competencies for inclusive teaching. An effort is made to identify the self-assessed level of teacher competencies for individualized instruction, its correlation with age, work experience, and the level of professional competencies, as well as if there are any differences in this regard between Croatian and Slovenian teachers.

Based on the analysed literature and the empirical results of the conducted international research, we discuss possibilities for the improvement of teachers' professional competencies in these areas. The research has resulted in a set of proven instruments that can serve as a good empirical foundation for further monitoring of this issue. Additionally, these results allow for new insights into the mentioned areas and also highlight those topics that require additional deep and extensive research, particularly when it comes to the understudied complex relationships between social status and teachers' professional competencies in developing pupils' transversal competencies. The obtained findings can be useful as a scientific foundation for designing changes and improving in-service programs of teachers' professional development. It is also expected that the findings will contribute to the promotion of the quality of professional development of teachers in accordance with contemporary approaches, and will raise the scientific and professional publics' awareness of the importance of further research in these areas.

We wish to express our gratitude to all those who cooperated on the project and the chapter authors who, while writing on specific topics, integrated contemporary theoretical approaches with the results of empirical research and thus contributed to a better understanding of the complex relationships among the discussed topics by

embedding new knowledge into the field of educational science. We are grateful to our reviewers for their helpful suggestions and our proofreader on his improvements to the manuscript. We are also thankful to the University of Rijeka Foundation and Scientific Foundation of the Faculty of Arts from the University of Ljubljana for co-financing the translations of the scientific monograph into English and Slovenian. We are especially grateful to the teachers for their willingness to participate in our research; without them, this manuscript would not have been possible.

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