

COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH IN THE EDUCATION OF SOCIAL PEDAGOGY STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION

CURRENT ISSUE

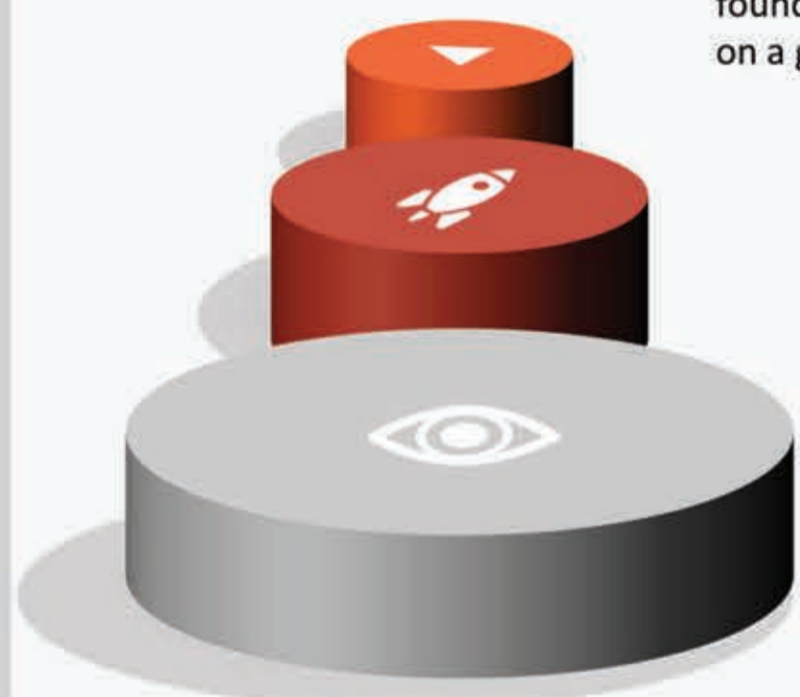
Competency-based approach as the foundation of an education system reform on a global scale, including Bulgaria.

GOAL

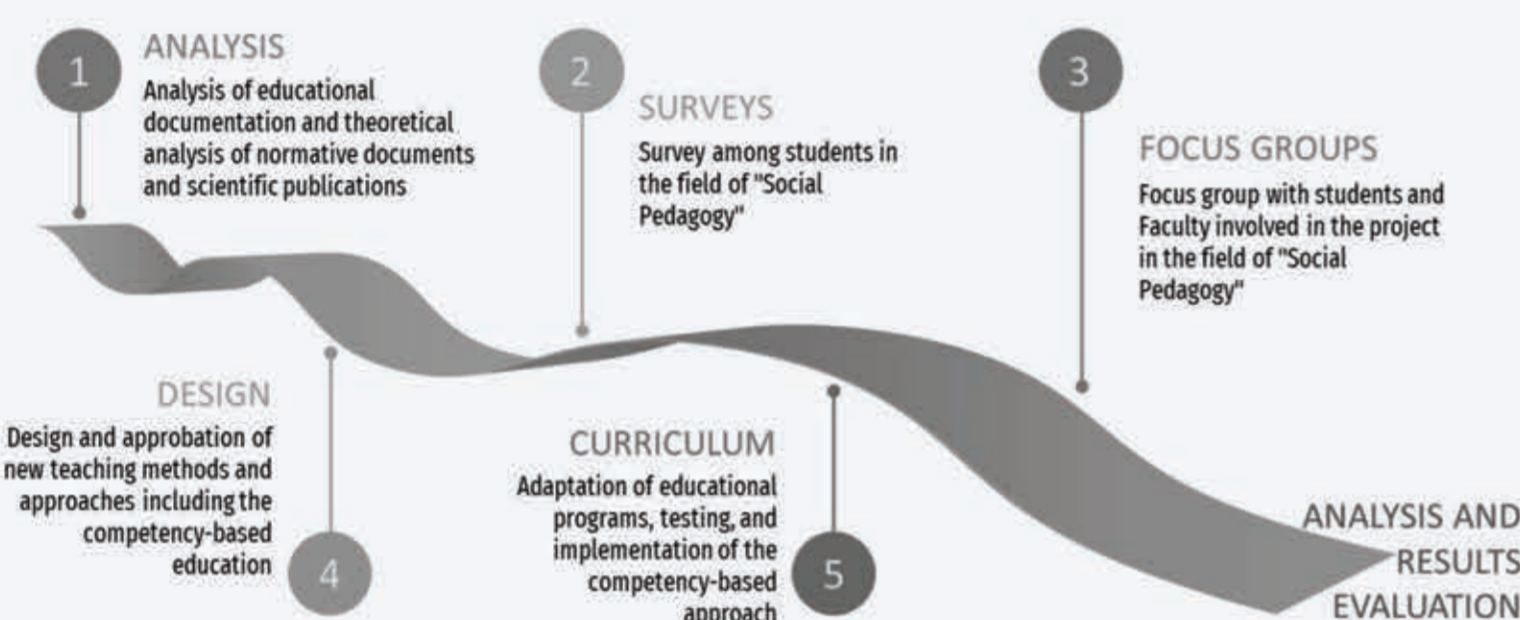
Development of a sustainable mechanism for the modernisation of existing and new curricula and program using a competency-based approach.

VISION

Achieving a positive impact on improving student motivation for learning and self-efficacy, as well as a more adequate integration into the labor market.



METHODOLOGY



TASKS

- To conceptualize a framework for the implementation of the competency-based approach in the education of students in Social Pedagogy.
- To adapt educational programs and introduce teaching and assessment technologies within the context of the competency-based approach.
- To pilot-test the innovations within the project period.
- To evaluate the results and their subsequent application in the educational process of students enrolled in the Social Pedagogy program.

RESEARCH GROUP

Head of the research group:

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Members of the group:

Assoc. Prof. Marina Pironkova, PhD

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RESULTS

- A survey of the relevant literature reveals a variety of competencies identified as essential for the effective performance of social pedagogues in different professional roles and positions.
- Universities and professional schools that train social educators (either independently or in the form of combined social pedagogy and social work programs) have developed their own academic frameworks for competency-based training in the field. There is no uniformity in the formulations, and the definition of competencies varies widely.
- An empirical study with 114 students in Social Pedagogy, from 1st to 4th year of study, conducted with a questionnaire and a focus group aiming to find out the most important competencies to be developed during studies, showed the following:

Competence	Frequency distribution	Percentage
Working with a client	77	67%
Personal	63	55%
Empathy	45	39%
Communication	38	33%
Theoretical	32	28%

Table 1: Frequency and quantitative distribution by groups of competencies

- A self-assessment questionnaire has been validated as part of a number of methods for assessing progress within six curricula updated according to a competency-based learning framework. A total of 131 full-time students of Social Pedagogy participated in the study between October, 2023 and January, 2024.

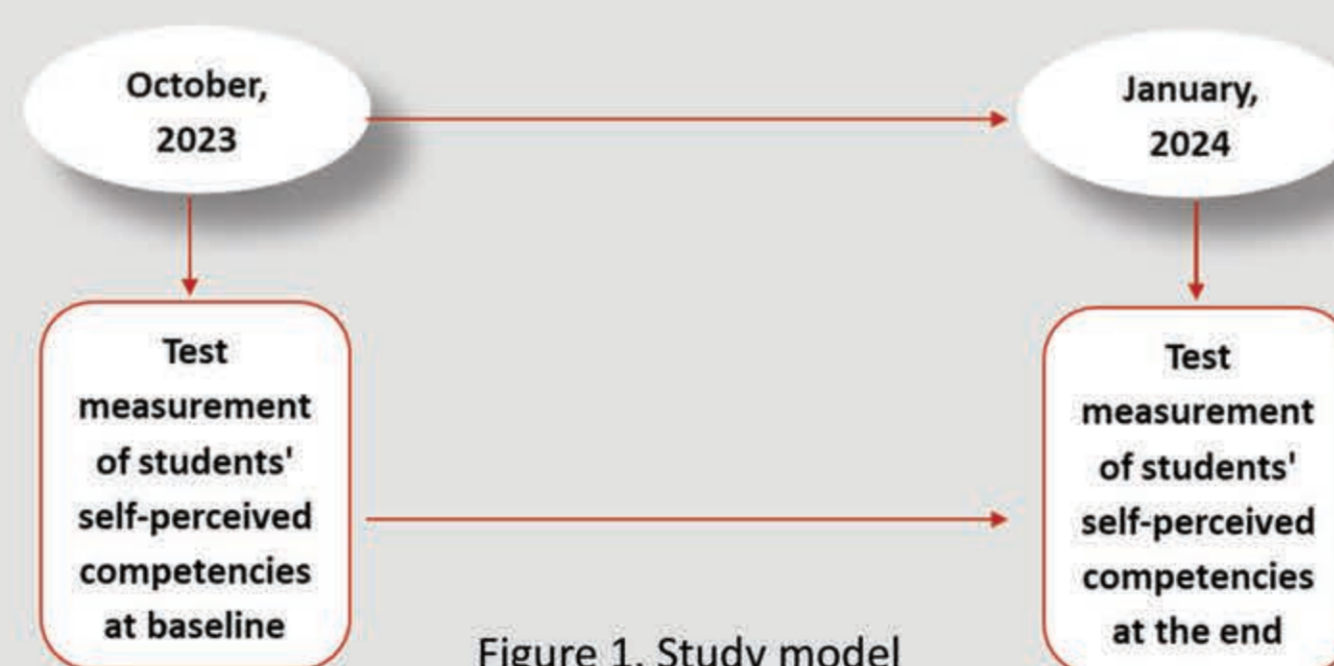


Figure 1. Study model

- The self-assessment questionnaires recorded change in all groups of students across all subjects developed according to the competency-based framework conceptualized by the research team in the context of the project. The most significant change is reported in the competences "Professional" and "Personal" (Fig. 2)

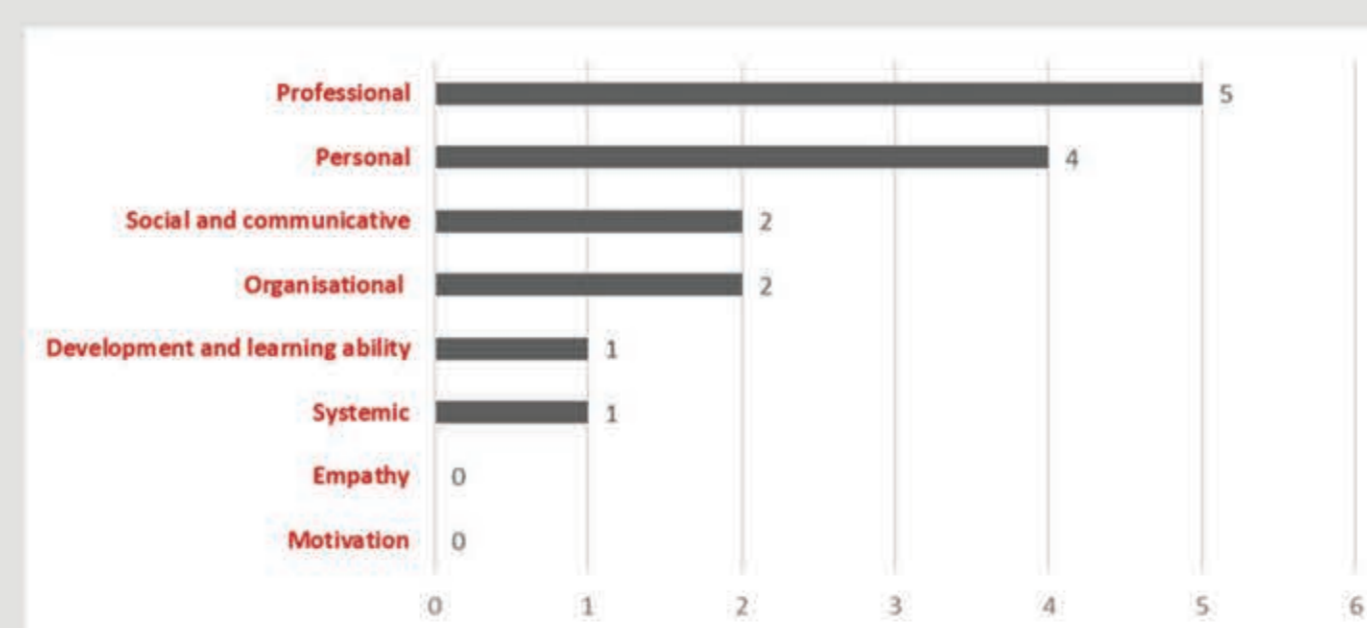


Figure 2. Quantitative distribution of competences

- The same study design was applied between October 2024 and January 2025. The data is being processed and the results will be used in the finalization of the toolkit being developed within the project.
- Two articles have been prepared submitted and accepted for publication in Pedagogy journal, indexed in Web of Science, as follows:

NEXT STEPS

- Future research within the project includes both further refinement of the self-assessment tool and experimentation with additional ways of process-oriented feedback and achieving pluralism in assessment (Koenen, Dochy, & Berghmans 2015), alongside ongoing renewal of the learning process in the context of a competency-based approach.
- A roundtable is planned to communicate the results among the academic community, both faculty and students.
- As a final stage in the validation of the author's approach used within the project, a final assessment of the results of the students involved in the project research is planned within the framework of the state examination in practice. This will include a plural assessment through portfolio, self-assessment and assessment by the practice mentor and supervising lecturer against the approved competency checklist.

CONCLUSIONS

So far, the analysis of the process of implementation of competency-based learning and the results of the research conducted within the conceptual framework of the project makes it possible to identify some factors that need to be considered further:

- Peer assessment, as part of the proposed competency-based assessment methods, is difficult to implement in groups where students do not know each other well or are unwilling to comment on a peer's performance for fear of being perceived as offensive.
- The development of competency-based courses is hampered by the lack of resources in terms of: time (due to high workload), quantity (e.g. large groups of students), organization (e.g. established teaching schedules and lecture formats), etc.
- The large number of students in the groups makes the transition from the role of lecturer to that of consultant and facilitator of the learning process difficult.



PUBLICATIONS

- Tcholakova, M., Pironkova, M., Ranev, A., Staneva, Y. COMPETENCE FOR SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE: WHAT DO STUDENTS TELL US?. Pedagogy (in press)
- Tcholakova, M., Tsenov, M., Nikolov, Ts., Kostov, K. SELF-ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCIES IN THE PROCESS OF TRAINING IN SOCIAL PEDAGOGY: PRELIMINARY RESULTS. Pedagogy (in press). (in Bulgarian).