

## **Perception of Student Teachers about Teaching Competencies**

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### **Abstract**

*Education in its holistic approach serves many purposes. It enables a person to stretch his potentialities for welfare of self, family and society. Education enthuses the individual with responsibility of developing and sustaining a just socio-economic system, conserving and transmitting human heritage, moreover adopting a sensible and sensitive approach towards utilization of resources. These aspirations can't be accomplished in absence of proficient educational system, especially a professionally competent teacher. Student teachers enter the initial teacher training programme with already established beliefs and value system. Their perception of teacher and teaching profession can play a significant role in developing competencies to be an adept teacher. This paper is an effort to get a glimpse of student teachers' preferred competencies.*

**Index terms:** Competency, Personal competency, Professional competency, Student Teacher, Perception

### **Introduction**

A paramount factor in the teaching learning system is the teacher. A sound educational system can flourish if two conditions are successfully met. First is the constant updating and refinement in knowledge and skill of serving teachers and second one is equipping student teachers (teacher trainees) with befitting competencies and positive attitude towards profession. Competencies are specific and demonstrable characteristics or attributes inevitable for teaching professionals to create a convincing and learner friendly environment. Competencies being concerned with three domains of learner's behaviour are imperative for teacher to bear prime responsibilities. Besides disseminating knowledge, teacher helps students:

- a) To develop rationale and scientific temperament.
- b) To foresee advancements in all spheres of life and its impact on the society.
- c) To help students in conserving and transmitting values nurtured by the society.

### **Who is a competent teacher?**

Mere possession of knowledge and certified qualification gives no assurance to meet the aforesaid objectives. For this, it is obligatory for a teacher to have appropriate comprehension of human nature, its needs, and developmental principles in light of urbanisation, technology advancements and industrialisation locally as well as globally. Due to vast extension in roles and responsibilities, a teacher has to display high order of professionalism inside and outside the classroom. It is impossible for a teacher to possess all competencies in perfect amalgam though training and experience lead teacher towards proficiency. A competent teacher is temperamentally warm and cordial. She has clear vision of the set objectives. She executes meticulously whatever is planned. Management of affairs is done effectively by her inside and outside the classroom. Her skill of presentation of subject matter is able to seek attention of students. She is capable of motivating the back benchers.

### **Prior research findings related to perception of teaching competencies**

It is established beyond doubt that there lies a strong relationship between teacher competence and effective teaching. Teaching competence also bears the marks of perception, value and beliefs that the individual carries when she enters teacher training programme. This view is supported by Hirst (1990); Koetsier, Wubbles and Korthagen (1997). While echoing similar views, Joram and Gabrielle (1998); Anderseon, Blumenfield, Pintrich, Clark, Marx and Peterson (1995); Wubbles (1992); Zeichner and Gore (1990) stated that most student teachers enter programme with already established set of beliefs. Bodycott, Walker and Lee (2001) advocated similar views by stating that earlier *formed beliefs and principles are part and parcel of student teachers' personality*. Perceptions and expectations of profession form the beliefs. Richardson (1996) highlighted that beliefs are formed due to accumulation of prior experiences in home and at school. Kagan (1992) reiterated that students always bear in memory their days as students and impressions of good teachers.

Powell (1992); Hollingsworth (1989) in their studies revealed that in the perception of pre-service teachers content, knowledge and ability to communicate form the foundation of good teaching. Wade and Moor (1992) stated that teachers need knowledge of pedagogy and training to develop themselves as adept teachers confident of their own ability and with a faith on the potential of the students. Pajares (1992) believed that attitudes, expectations, perceptions of student teachers during training period must be taken into account by teacher educators. This can extend help in inculcating values and desirable competencies among student teachers.

### **Objectives of Study**

Teaching is a challenging activity with vast operational area. It relies on clearly defined set of competencies possessed by professionals working in this field. Initial teacher training programme stresses on developing these competencies to bring quality in education sector. Perception plays a pivotal role in attainment and practice of competencies in professional field. The present study focuses on perception of student teachers of the essential competencies they want to see in a teacher. The objectives of the study were:

- a) To find out the perception of student teachers of the essential competencies in teaching
- b) To identify the competencies ranked high by student teachers
- c) To find out the least preferred competencies perceived by teacher students
- d) To bring to light some significant competencies ranked low by student teachers

### **Methodology**

100 student teachers of B.Ed. programme in St. Xavier's College, Ranchi (an autonomous college under Ranchi University) were taken as the sample for the study. Two of them didn't respond. Hence, the sample size remained restricted to 98 comprising 73 Female and 25 male student teachers. Student teachers at the start of session were asked to write and rank any twenty competencies which they considered essential for them to excel in the job as a teacher. The competency which they considered the most indispensable was ranked as number one and the least preferred one was ranked twenty. Student teachers actively participated in this exercise.

After reviewing the text written by them, sixty five competencies were identified as the overall teaching competencies. An item wise analysis was done to discard the overlapping and least preferred competencies. In the second stage, competencies were categorised under two headings as personal and professional. Out of the total 22 items were classified as personal and 23 items as professional competencies. After one month from the first exercise, student teachers were again asked to rank these competencies in descending order from 1-22/23. The competency placed at number one was given a score of 22/23 and the one placed at the bottom was given score one by the researcher. This process was repeated for all listed competencies by ninety eight student teachers. Mean of each competency was calculated by using the following formulae.

$$\text{Mean} = \text{Total score of each competency} / \text{No. of student teachers}$$

### **Presentation:**

**Table-1:** Mean values of Personal competencies

Sl. No.	Competency	Mean
1	Confident	16.204
2	Intelligent	15.276
3	Friendly	14.888
4	Polite	14.694
5	Patient	14.563
6	Honest	14.480
7	Intellectual	13.337
8	Pleasant Personality	12.980
9	Energetic	12.898
10	Positive attitude for weak students	12.429
11	Love for students	11.929
12	Helpful	11.163
13	Healthy	11.153
14	Kind	11.031
15	Social	10.949
16	Guide	9.888
17	Approachable	8.469
18	Patriotic	8.235
19	Neat/ Smart dressing	8.143
20	Humorous	8.061
21	Not Vindictive	7.153
22	Promotes National Integration	7.102

**Table-2** : Mean values of Professional competencies

Sl. No.	Competency	Mean
1.	Knowledge of subject matter	18.653
2.	Effective communication skill	17.541
3.	Punctual	16.480
4.	Disciplinarian	15.286
5.	Understands child psychology	14.357
6.	Decision making capability	13.520
7.	Prepares lesson before teaching	13.460
8.	Motivates students	13.296
9.	Takes leadership	13.092
10.	Good Planner	12.898
11.	Command over language	12.735
12.	Updated knowledge	12.224
13.	Proper use of teaching skills	12.031
14.	Trained Professional	11.878
15.	Dedicated	11.602
16.	Good manager	11.276
17.	Experience in teaching	11.204
18.	Impartial	10.837
19.	Creative	10.786
20.	Democratic	8.000
21.	Actively participates in co-curricular activities	6.929
22.	Courteous & respectful to parents	6.265
23.	Technology savvy	5.765

### Results

As evident from Table-1, personal competencies like confident (16.204), intelligent (15.276), friendly, polite, patient, honest are the top five competencies followed by pleasant personality, energetic, and positive attitude towards weak students. Competencies like neat and smart dressing, humorous, not vindictive and promoting national integration are the bottom ranked competencies. In professional category, student teachers attach more value to knowledge of subject matter (18.653), effective communication skill (17.541), punctual (16.480), disciplinarian (15.286) and Understands Child Psychology (14.357). Student teachers do not rate highly the competencies like Actively participates in school activity (6.929), courteous and respectful to parents (6.265) and technology savvy (5.765), while competencies like updated knowledge (12.224), proper use of teaching skills (12.031), trained professional (11.878) find place in middle order as indicated in Table-2.

### Discussion

- Perception of student teachers regarding teaching competencies bears the influence of teaching styles and methods adopted by their teachers. Many researchers opined this by stating that teachers reflect ways of teaching of their own teachers (Frank, 1990; Fulton, 1989; Goodland, 1990; Handler, 1993). Student teachers consider that a confident and an intelligent teacher can accomplish professional duties convincingly. Hence they attached utmost importance to these competencies by placing them at number one and two. Polite, Patient and Honest are other noteworthy competencies. As per perception of student teachers, basic competencies like honest, patient, kind and caring attitude in a teacher help students to realise their true potential. Students always look forward to encouragement and companionship extended by teachers. Veldman and Peck (1963) also found that friendly, cheerful, knowledgeable are the characteristics which are always looked up by students in a teacher. Self concept of students becomes high when teacher is more social and willing to extend emotional support to students. Lowman (1984) advocated this view by stating that a successful teacher is able to develop interpersonal relations with students and stimulate them intellectually. Student teachers also acknowledged this and placed competencies like love for student, kind, helpful and social among top fifteen competencies.
- Performance of bright and more vocal classmates sometimes causes anxiety and exerts pressure on quieter and introvert students in the class. Knowledge of psychological principles, being friendly and humorous help teachers motivate such students and encourage them to participate actively in the classroom/ school activities. Calderhead (1996), Pianta (1999) and Watson (2003) also hold the same viewpoint by pointing that teaching relies on psychological principles. Motivating students, creating personal rapport with them and generating conducive environment of learning entirely depend on personal competencies of a teacher.
- These days much emphasis is laid on the role of a teacher as a guide. Appropriate and timely guidance boosts the confidence level of students along with preventing wastage of time. Best (1991) viewed that leading aim of a teacher should be to promote spirit of inquiry and cultivate habit of independent thinking among students.

- Besides possessing these competencies teachers display certain salient professional competencies which are requisite to meet demands of this profession. Student teachers have ranked knowledge of subject matter, communication skill, maintaining punctuality and discipline as foremost teaching competencies. These competencies are also acknowledged by many. Medley (1977) observed that competent teacher is well versed in his subject as well as possesses positive attitude towards school. Kalra (1977) pointed out that quality of teaching is influenced by sound knowledge of subject matter and application of psychological principles by teacher. Kohll (1992) stressed that a competent teacher embodies knowledge of subject matter, has understanding of society's needs and factors bearing impact on education. Mukhopadhyay (1994) rightly claimed that effective communication skills leads students towards meaningful behaviour and helps teacher in attaining educational goals. Spirthall et.al. (1994) stressed on importance of both verbal and non verbal communication in the class by teacher. Communication also helps teacher in establishing trustworthy relationship with parents and in convincing authorities of her capabilities. Teacher should be a disciplinarian. Student teachers advocated this competency by placing it at number four. A motivated environment can be created in the class if students are self disciplined. Ur (1996) stated that discipline aids teacher in smooth conduction of class by facilitating encouraging situations in the class.
- Decision making capability is also a preferred competency of student teachers. Classroom affairs and other professional engagements can be managed efficiently if appropriate decisions are taken by the teacher. Bolin (1989) stated that decision making capability must be developed in teacher for personal and professional growth. Lee (1991) agreed to this by stating that teachers should be empowered to act as professionals. Bennis (1989) stated that leadership signifies judicious use of power and wisdom for attainment of goal. Ovando (1996) echoed similar views that teachers who possess leadership quality dare to be more innovative in class. Student teachers have also voted this competency highly by giving it ninth rank. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) agreed to this by saying that leadership of teacher extends beyond classroom and casts influence on society also. Teacher as leader also plays the role of decision maker, action researcher, knowledge facilitator and motivator. Teacher as motivator improves confidence level of students. Cultured and encouraging language used by teacher in the classroom, stimulates students to perform well. Sarcasm, rebuke or corporal punishments are not in scene in modern classrooms. Student teachers also strongly believe this.
- Experience in any profession is considered as an asset. This holds true for teaching also. Keeping importance of experience in mind, student teachers consider it as a vital competency. Lieberman et.al (2000) reported that experience of a teacher gives him confidence and improves his performance in teaching, motivating, encouraging and leading students.

However, competencies like not vindictive, technology savvy and promotion of national integration are not ranked highly by the student teachers. Student teachers perceived that a teacher has to be kind, impartial and patriot, so they placed these competencies at higher rank and the former competencies on lower pedestal. Teachers have to be technology savvy so that modern technology can find entrance in classroom and can be exploited for the benefit of the learners. But this competency is placed at the lowest rank by the student teachers. Reasons for this can be that student teachers belong to that generation of learners who have not seen use of technology in class rooms nor in the teacher training institutes. Educational technology should be taught not as a theoretical subject but student teachers must get a training to apply it practically in classrooms. In student teacher's perception, certain competencies like love for students, knowledge of subject matter, punctuality, communication skill are indispensable and can't be replaced by other competencies.

### **Conclusion**

Teaching being a multifaceted activity requires updated knowledge and broad vision. A student teacher might be gifted with some natural endowments to be a competent teacher. But knowledge and application of pedagogical principles develops professional acumen and profound understanding of learner's behaviour. Initial teacher training programme can address the issue of individual differences with respect to student teachers by designing curriculum in such a way that stress is on competency development. For this, improvement in microteaching techniques and practice teaching sessions is necessary. Focussing attention on student teachers through continuous comprehensive evaluation throughout the training period is a prerequisite for an efficient teacher training programme.

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