

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL COMPETENCES OF TECHNICAL SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF EMPLOYERS' NEEDS

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Keywords: work pedagogy, key competencies, life-long learning, labour market, professional development

Abstract. The article presents the employers' expectations for employees in the context of desirable competences, as well as forecasts of professions in short supply on the labour market. Personal and social competences of students of schools providing vocational education (on the example of IT technician and hotel technician professions) are approximated. It presents the opinion of teachers of vocational subjects on the characteristics that they would like to equip students for further professional careers.

KOMPETENCJE PERSONALNE I SPOŁECZNE UCZNIÓW TECHNIKUM W KONTEKŚCIE POTRZEB PRACODAWCÓW

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika pracy, kompetencje kluczowe, uczenie się przez całe życie, rynek pracy, rozwój zawodowy

Streszczenie. Artykuł prezentuje oczekiwania pracodawców wobec pracowników w kontekście pożądaných kompetencji, jak również przedstawia prognozy zawodów deficytowych na rynku pracy. Przybliżono kompetencje personalne i społeczne uczniów szkół prowadzących kształcenie zawodowe (na przykładzie zawodu technik informatyk i technik hotelarstwa). Zaprezentowano opinię nauczycieli przedmiotów zawodowych na temat cech, w jakie chcieliby wyposażyc ucznia na dalszą drogę zawodową.

Introduction. Interpersonal relations and development of an individual and a society

Every person functions in an interpersonal space, in which constant relations with other people occur. All the occurrent social phenomena are rooted in and determined by a specific historical period and its culture. Both culture and historicity preordain the situation of an individual in everyday life.

Interpersonal relations can occur either among social entities (groups, organisations, associations, communities, institutions and countries), in which they are realised in a macro scale, or among individuals, in which case they are accomplished in a micro scale. They are the most important element of all areas of everyday life (family, work, etc.) and their nature is significantly different¹.

Society is not a brassbound formation, it is a complicated process which is constantly evolving, becoming. The uniqueness of the whole society stems from the configuration of particular individuals, who, in turn, depend on the position of individuals in different networks of interpersonal relations. An individual is an inhabitant of a distinct place in the interpersonal space and, together with others, creates a network of interpersonal relations². By starting interactions with other individuals, members of a society constantly shape their personality and change their attitude in mutual relations³. Such members are subject to constant inner, mental processes of acquisition and processing of knowledge. They also accept or reject other people's beliefs. Interpersonal space is flexible, it adapts accordingly to the changes in the configuration of interpersonal relations. The members of the society among whom significant relations and mutual relevance occur, constitute social entities. By initiating actions towards others, an individual is conscious of their human character and foresees their reactions.

The world of everyday life is inter-subjective and shared with others. Interactions in this world occur e.g. during conversations, and the basic condition for them to exist is mutuality, understood as the process of defining and interpreting actions taken by particular members of the group. They understand the actions

¹ P. Sztompka, *Kapitał społeczny. Teoria przestrzeni międzyludzkiej* [Social capital. The theory of interpersonal space], Znak, Kraków 2016.

² G. Simmel, *Pisma socjologiczne* [Sociological writings]. (M. Łukasiewicz, Trans.), Ofic. Nauk., Warszawa 2008.

³ N. Elias, *Spółczeństwo jednostek* [The Society of Individuals]. (J. Stawiński, Trans.), Wyd. Nauk. PWN, Warszawa 2008.

of another person and can adjust their own responses accordingly⁴. An important aspect of experiencing other people in everyday life is directness or indirectness of such an experience. The form of direct contacts, during which classifying patterns influencing the interaction are applied (e.g. teacher – student, employer – employee), is most significantly marked with subjectivism. These patterns are useful during everyday routine activities. The sum of all classifications and interaction patterns resulting from them constitute the social structure. This structure is the basic element of the reality of everyday life⁵.

In the web of individual relations or relations occurring within a particular collectivity, i.e. in the practical interpersonal space, an individual acquires, among others, social capital. This capital brings benefits in various areas, aids enrichment and extension of own material goods, as well as ensures benefits stemming from the collectivity, in which an individual lives and works. Individuals comprising societies are directed in interpersonal relations by certain moral rules, the most important of which are trust, loyalty, mutuality, solidarity, respect and justice. Functioning in a civil society, in which the abovementioned norms and moral values are obeyed, ensures the feeling of existential security and predictability of other people's reactions. It also contributes to being open towards co-citizens, creativity and innovativeness. It should be underlined that each individual also possesses a unique human capital, which is a collection of features, such as natural aptitudes, acquired abilities, aspirations, motivations, as well as attitudes providing an individual with work-related success, and, consequently, providing entities (firms, corporations) with desired effects of their business activity. One of the varieties of human capital is educational capital, which is connected with educational background. The higher the educational capital is, the better job and the higher social status an individual has⁶.

Entering interpersonal relations is connected with measurable profits not only for an individual, but also for the whole collectivity. Living together with other people entails a number of norms and regulations, which are defined in the course of interactions. Each generation takes advantage of the benefaction and the heritage left by previous generations and strives for personal development, as well as the development of the whole society. No one can remain

⁴ G.H. Mead, *Umysł, osobowość i społeczeństwo* [Mind, Personality and Society], (Z. Wolińska, Trans.), PWN, Warszawa 1975.

⁵ L. Berger, & T. Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Penguin Books, London 1991.

⁶ P. Sztompka, op. cit.

indifferent to the changes occurring in the socio-economical dimension. These changes result from new techniques and technologies, the idea of an economy based on knowledge, the globalisation of social and economic processes, the increase of share in the international trade, the necessity to adapt to the current conditions on the labour market, the readiness to change the job and the place of living, as well as the increase of employers' expectations towards potential employees.

Each student of a technical secondary school is being prepared to be able to do his profession successfully and to participate actively in a dynamically changing job market. At school, these students enter into relations with teachers and one another, they obtain particular competences, which may be useful in their further professional and personal life and, as a result, they contribute to the development of the whole society.

Employers' expectations about their employees

Employers mainly look for employees with specific professional competences, such as performing actions and fulfilling responsibilities typical for a particular professions (50% of the employers seeking employees), non-specific competences, such as self-organisational skills, leading initiative, punctuality and motivation to work (42%), as well as interpersonal competences concerning contacts with other people, e.g. colleagues and customers (35%). Employers are mostly satisfied with the abilities of their employees (53%), however, some of them (43%) notice areas in which they would like to provide them with more training in order to raise the level of their professional abilities related to their particular position (56%), self-organisational competences, punctuality, work organisation, leading initiative and motivation to work, as well as interpersonal competences concerning contacts with other people and teamwork skills (18%)⁷.

„Professions' barometer 2019” indicates that the majority of difficulties related to recruitment of employees is experienced by the employers in the following sectors: construction, production, transport, gastronomy, medicine and

⁷ M. Kocór, A. Strzebońska, *Raport z badań pracodawców i ofert pracy realizowanych w 2010 r. w ramach projektu „Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego”*. *Jakich pracowników potrzebują polscy pracodawcy?* [Report on the survey of employers and job offers carried out in 2010 within the framework of the „Human Capital Balance” project. What kind of employees do Polish employers need?], PARP, Warszawa 2011 https://pracownik.kul.pl/files/12843/public/Jakich_pracownikow_potrzebuja_polscy_pracodawcy.pdf.

caretaking, services, and finance. In the *construction sector* there is a shortage of candidates who would be willing to work in difficult conditions requiring physical strength, enjoy good health, and are available and ready to change the place of work frequently. The *production sector* needs employees with a wide range of abilities, multi-professionals, e.g. cutting and milling machine operators, as well as turners who are good at technical drawing and have computer skills. Moreover, employers also seek people with specific qualifications, such as SEP training for electricians (SEP stands for Association of Polish Power Engineers), or courses teaching MIG/MAG and TIG methods for welders. The *transport sector* predominantly lacks people who have completed expensive and time-consuming trainings finishing with a difficult exam that allows them to drive buses and lorries with the maximum authorised mass (MAM) exceeding 3.5 tones. Then, there is a shortage of bus drivers characterised by high responsibility, resistance to stress and readiness to work shifts, as well as lorry drivers working in international transport, with high availability and fluent in foreign languages. Finally, the deficit of car mechanics who have chosen their profession out of passion is also noticeable. In the *gastronomy sector* employers search for people willing to work at nights, weekends and during holidays, and ready to work physically. Chefs are required to be independent, creative, resistant to stress, experienced and knowledgeable about different culinary techniques. Cooks and bakers, on the other hand, are expected to have enough practical skills. In the *medical and caretaking sector* there is a need for employees who are not discouraged by a long career path and who are interested in working professionally in small towns or boroughs. In the *services sector* employees are expected to have practical abilities and experience, as well as to know current trends. In the *financial sector* there is a demand for experienced employees who follow the latest developments in their area and who are familiar with professional software. In the case of e.g. accountants, the willingness to start a low-paid internship is also appreciated⁸.

The job market is focused on skilled employees who display key competences understood as the consolidation of knowledge, skills and attitudes, all of which are developed in the perspective of lifelong learning.

⁸ *Barometr zawodów 2019. Raport podsumowujący badania w Polsce* [Professions' barometer 2019. Report summarising the research in Poland (2018)], WUP, Kraków 2018, https://barometrzawodow.pl/userfiles/Barometr/2019/raport_ogolnopolski_pl.pdf.

Personal and social competences of students attending schools that provide vocational education

Key competences are vital for personal and professional development, self-realisation, social inclusion, balanced and health-promoting lifestyle, maintaining peaceful relations in a society, as well as being an active citizen.

Personal, social and learning competences, which are considered key competences, are defined as „the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, work with others in a constructive way, remain resilient and manage one’s own learning and career”⁹.

The changes taking recently place in the society have led, on the one hand, to challenging all the elements of a linear social order, and, on the other hand, to undermining the dominant role of tradition, religion and family in the process of socialising, including the upbringing of teenagers. Students of technical secondary schools need to function in the world characterised by inconsistency, lack of consequences of some behaviours, fragmentation, as well as episodicality of omnifarious spheres of human life. Nowadays, there is no single canon, no right path or truth shaped by previous generations, within which an individual could exist doubtlessly.

Having personal, social and learning competences fosters dealing with uncertainty and complexity of the surrounding world. An individual can do that by using the best learning strategies adequate to current needs, taking care of one’s own physical and emotional wellbeing, leading health-promoting lifestyle, feeling empathy as well as searching for optimal solutions in conflict situations. The attitude of an individual is focused on the construction of interpersonal relations and co-participation in social life, both of which require understanding the norms of conduct as well as the rules of communication accepted by a particular social group or a particular society. Individuals feel the need to develop their competences according to their own talents and the labour market requirements. They can manage their career, as well as social interactions, estimate their abilities accurately, reflect critically on their actions, and make appropriate decisions.

⁹ *Zalecenia Rady UE z dn. 22 maja 2018 r. w sprawie kompetencji kluczowych w procesie uczenia się przez całe życie (2018/C 189/01), s.10* [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (Text with EEA relevance) (2018/C 189/01)], [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&qid=1573124391134&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&qid=1573124391134&from=EN).

At schools that provide professional education, students are prepared to gain full vocational qualifications and to acquire all essential professional certificates. In the process of professional education, it is crucial to integrate and correlate general education with professional training.

General education in primary schools constitutes the basis of education and enables obtaining various professional qualifications, and mastering or extending them later by adding new qualifications, which initiates a lifelong learning process¹⁰.

The expected outcomes of professional education taught in vocational schools are described in the form of knowledge, vocational skills, as well as personal and social competences. Moreover, these competences have been separated from the units of educational outcomes typical of a single qualification, professional foreign language and organisation of teamwork (only for professions taught on a technical level) in the core curriculum of vocational education¹¹.

Personal and social competences of students in selected professions of vocational education

The professions of an IT specialist and a hospitality technician have been chosen to the following analysis as the nature of work in these two jobs is quite dissimilar. Teachers of vocational subjects in schools preparing for both of these professions devote a lot of attention to enabling their students to acquire knowledge, skills, and personal and social competences.

The curriculum of the IT specialist training is focused mainly on electronic devices. This profession is really future-oriented and requires constant expansion of the already possessed knowledge and skills, because the development of computer and digital technologies is very rapid. In the past, there was a general belief that people working as IT specialists live in the world limited to their computer, and that they only use jargon which is not understandable for an average person.

¹⁰ Rozporządzenie MEN z dnia 30 stycznia 2018 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, technikum oraz branżowej szkoły II stopnia Dz.U. 2018, poz. 467 [The Regulation of the Polish Minister of Education of 30th January 2018 on the core curriculum of general education for secondary schools, secondary technical schools and 2nd degree vocational schools Dz.U. 2018, poz. 467].

¹¹ Rozporządzenie MEN z dnia 15 lutego 2019 r. w sprawie ogólnych celów i zadań kształcenia w zawodach szkolnictwa branżowego oraz klasyfikacji zawodów szkolnictwa branżowego, Dz.U. 2019, poz. 316 [The Regulation of the Polish Minister of Education of 15th February 2019 on the general aims and tasks of education in professions of vocational education and classification of professions of vocational education, Dz.U. 2019, poz. 316].

Nowadays, this image has been significantly modified alongside the expectations of employers. IT specialists are considered to be willing to self-develop permanently, able to predict long-term consequences of their decisions, concentrate instantly, as well as think and act innovatively. They are believed to have wide general knowledge about the world and new technologies, to be perceptive and, which is equally significant, open, communicative and able to clearly formulate and communicate their opinions. People working in this profession have a wide range of responsibilities and tasks. Also, almost constantly, they need to cooperate with different people, e.g. a representative of a company which they carry out a specific project for, such as creating an internet site for business clients in order to increase the demand for their products, or administering a computer network in order to assure efficient functioning of a firm or an institution.

An IT specialist trainee strives to obtain two specialisations: INF.02 *Administration and utilization of computer systems, peripheral devices and local computer networks*, and INF.03 *Creating and administering internet sites and applications as well as databases*. The first specialisation is to prepare a student to perform professional tasks, such as setting up a computer system or peripheral devices, administering operating systems, servicing and fixing computer devices, as well as preparing and utilizing a local computer network. The second one is to teach a student how to create and administer internet sites, create, administer and use relational databases, program internet applications, as well as to create and administer systems of content management¹².

Hospitality management, similarly to IT, is a field that is developing really fast and is offering more and more job positions. Learning how to be a successful hospitality technician is focused mostly on relations with other people. A person working as a hospitality technician has to do, among other things, a number of activities related to a workmanlike and complex service of hotel guests, such as reception, room service, gastronomy and complimentary services.

In the profession of a hospitality technician there are two specialisations: HGT.03 *Service of guests in a facility offering hotel services*, and HGT.06 *Reception service*. The first specialisation is to prepare a student to such duties as keeping

¹² Rozporządzenie MEN z dnia 16 maja 2019 r. w sprawie podstaw programowych kształcenia w zawodach szkolnictwa branżowego oraz dodatkowych umiejętności zawodowych w zakresie wybranych zawodów szkolnictwa branżowego Dz.U. 2019, poz. 991, załącznik 28 [The Regulation of the Polish Minister of Education of 16th May 2019 on the core curriculum of vocational education and additional professional skills within the scope of selected professions in vocational education, Dz.U. 2019, poz. 991, Appendix 28].

the facility offering hotel services clean and tidy, preparing and serving breakfasts, as well as organizing additional services in the facility. The second one is to teach a student how to book hotel services and serve guests at the reception area¹³.

The comparison of personal and social competences for IT specialists and hospitality technicians explicitly shows the need to acquire mostly the same competences for both professions. These competences include: obeying the rules of propriety and professional ethics, planning tasks, assuming responsibility for the actions taken, showing creativity and openness to change, applying stress management techniques, perfecting professional skills, applying rules of interpersonal communication and working in a team.

Students attending IT secondary schools also acquire personal and social competences, such as applying problem-solving methods and techniques. Hospitality management students, on the other hand, learn how to recognize individual needs of hotel guests, as well as how to plan activities and manage time appropriately.

Table 1. Personal and social competences for the professions of an IT specialist and a hospitality technician

Personal and social competences	
IT specialist	Hospitality technician
obeys the rules of propriety and professional ethics (both INF.02 and INF.03)	obeys the rules of propriety and ethics in relations with guests, supervisors and co-workers (both HGT.03 and HGT.06)
plans tackling tasks (both INF.02 and INF.03)	plans tackling professional tasks (HGT.06)
assumes responsibility for actions taken (both INF.02 and INF.03)	assumes responsibility for actions taken (HGT.03) / assumes responsibility for professional actions taken (HGT.06)
shows creativity and openness to change (both INF.02 and INF.03)	shows creativity and openness to change (both HGT.03 and HGT.06)
applies stress management techniques (both INF.02 and INF.03)	applies stress management techniques (both HGT.03 and HGT.06)

¹³ Ibidem, załącznik 12 [Appendix 12].

Contd. Table 1.

perfects professional skills (both INF.02 and INF.03)	updates knowledge and perfects professional skills (both HGT.03 and HGT.06)
applies rules of interpersonal communication (both INF.02 and INF.03)	applies rules in interpersonal communication (HGT.03) / applies rules of interpersonal communication (HGT.06)
negotiates terms of agreements (both INF.02 and INF.03)	negotiates terms of agreements (HGT.06)
works in a team (both INF.02 and INF.03)	works in a team (HGT.03)
applies problem-solving methods and techniques (both INF.02 and INF.03)	---
---	recognizes individual needs of hotel guests (HGT.03)
---	plans activities and manages time appropriately (HGT.03)

Source: Own elaboration based on The Regulation of the Polish Minister of Education of 16th May 2019 on the core curriculum of vocational education and additional professional skills within the scope of selected professions in vocational education, Dz.U. 2018, poz. 991.

Personal and social competences of technical secondary school students are tightly correlated with moulding particular attitudes and features in them. In both IT and hospitality management schools the acquisition of these personal and social competences is a constant process which lasts the whole school year. By accustoming students with certain rules of conduct, teachers invoke school statutes, proactive and pedagogic programmes, regulations on the use of classrooms or computer labs, as well as appropriate state regulations. In technical secondary schools teachers of vocational subjects pay attention to their students gaining competences sought after on the labour market by potential employers.

Teachers of vocational subjects working in urban agglomerations in both types of technical schools, who constitute a representative and expedient research sample (32 teachers), were asked by me in the school year 2018/2019 about the features they would like to equip their students with for their further career path. For the purpose of the topic discussed in this article, I have chosen only one of the questions from the interview questionnaire, which was applied during my research.

The questioned teachers gave the following responses: responsibility, communicativeness, independence, self-confidence (in the area of professional knowledge), ability to work in a team / group / with other people, ability to lead a team,

honesty, diligence, resourcefulness, openness, empathy, ability to connect theory with practice / the use of theoretical knowledge in practice, regularity, orderliness, and courage (to overcome difficulties and to take on new challenges).

The teachers from IT technical secondary schools would also like to equip their students with features such as: self-development, creativity, soft skills, social and professional competences, work time organization, focus on task, self-help, care about their own business, project management, unconventional reasoning, logical thinking, respect and acceptance of other people, reliability, curiosity about technical innovations, flexibility, modesty, punctuality, propriety, availability, inquisitiveness, trustworthiness, stress management, perceptiveness and assertiveness.

The teachers from hospitality management technical secondary schools would, respectively, like to equip their students with features such as: persistence, conscientiousness, and the ability to live according to the philosophy of a famous Polish educator and pedagogue Janusz Korczak: 'Being human means having crystal-clear morality, unlimited tolerance, and industriousness as fierce as passion, as well as striving for constant supplementing of one's education and helping others.'

The requirements that are imposed by vocational teachers on their students in technical secondary schools square with the requirements specified by the binding legal acts and inner school regulations.

Conclusions

In technical secondary schools teachers pay a lot of attention to providing their students with knowledge, skills and personal and social competences that are sought after on the labour market.

Teachers wish to make their students aware that adult life is usually subject to a variety of rules, which is why it is so important for students to learn and obey them. During causeries resulting from a difficult, conflict situation, teachers refer to real-life examples, e.g. they admonish students being late to class, as in the future if they are late for work, an employer may not want to extend a contract with them. Acquiring and respecting personal and social competences by students at school will be beneficial for them in their future career, since these requirements are identical as the ones of their future employers. Thus, they will be mandatory in a potential workplace.

Employers look for employees having personal and social competences appropriate for particular professions. However, without hard skills they will never be sufficient on their own, neither for the employer nor the employee in professional environment or on the job market.

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