Professional competences and selective procedures of teachers: Application of an analytical vision to corporal and musical expression

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ABSTRACT

The current constantly changing educational system requires reflexions about the role of teaching staff in the realm of corporal expression (in this case in primary education). These enable discovery and understanding of the professional competencies present in teaching practice, and how they are used in current selective processes. Thus, a qualitative study is presented that reports a case study using semi-structured interviews and focus groups as data collection tools, alongside a normative analysis of literature. In this sense, the study seeks to generate information about the importance of the professional competencies of teachers of Physical Education and Music Education in exercising corporal expression. This serves as a basis for a quality education that respects the characteristics present in the teaching environment and is sculpted to the specific needs of the pupils being taught. All of this aims to examine to what extent these competencies are present in current selective processes used by teachers within educational administrations, in this case, in the context of the autonomous community of Andalusia. In conclusion, selective systems will be deliberated in turn with the aim of proposing lines of research that offer more coherence and avoid the strong contradictions currently found within epistemological development in the training processes of teachers. The foundations for teacher selection that should be common when accessing the current system of public teaching will also be considered. Keywords: Teacher selection; Corporal expression; Teaching profession; Music education.


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E-mail: ricardovicente@ugr.es
Submitted for publication July 2019
Accepted for publication September 2019
Published in press October 2019
JOURNAL OF HUMAN SPORT & EXERCISE ISSN 1988-5202
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INTRODUCTION

It is evident that in the present day we find ourselves immersed in profound changes that affect different spheres of our lives. This leads to modifications in social perceptions, political and financial approaches, the way in which we understand communication and personal relationships, and even our way of being. Institutions also clearly evolve such as, for example, our educational system. In this way, a complicated system is constructed in which sociocultural, organisational and operational aspects interconnect, ultimately affecting ways of working in the classroom (Zurita et al. 2016).

In this new challenge the teacher assumes a fundamental role by insisting, continuously, that teachers enable learning based on problem solving and the implementation of learned concepts to take place (López, Pérez, Manrique & Monjas, 2016). In this way, the teacher should not only possess knowledge related to the areas of the curriculum but also a skillset that permits them to introduce original and motivating methodological aspects into their classes, promoting the interests of their students and enabling more creative and autonomous working. The function of teaching staff should not be limited to the mere transmission of a series of objectives and contents, but must also include interaction with the social and cultural environment in which they develop their practices (Vicente, 2016).

Despite this, although recent actions relating to the training of teaching staff are oriented towards new educational and social challenges, the processes related with the system of teacher selection fail to satisfactorily overcome these aspects. Thus, as noted by Aguilar-Parra, Álvarez & Lorenzo (2016) a procedure based on very basic aspects of learning such as comparison, selection and classification, predominate within our educational system.

In this sense, if we take the latest regulation relating to processes of teacher selection as a reference (Royal Decree 276/2007, 23th of February, approving the Regulation of entrance, access and acquisition of new specialities within teaching bodies), we can observe that the verification of pre-prepared and memorised content and concepts predominates. This proportion a greater importance to what future teachers know over their competency skills for teaching, as has been done for centuries.

Without doubt, the didactic and social particularities possessed by instruction of corporal and musical expression (Viciana, Zurita, Castro, Martínez & Chacón, 2017) (Vicente & Vicente, 2018) oblige the teacher to work to develop a series of skills and abilities which respond to various aspects. The first aspect responds to knowledge of a series of specific content and, the second, to the practical implementation in the classroom of methodological procedures in which the teacher’s knowledge and skills predominate. The professional competencies identified by teachers of physical education (Pazo-Haro & Tejada-Mora, 2012; Del Valle, De la Vega & Rodríguez, 2015) and music education (Vicente, 2016), are therefore considered as an essential focus of this study in the ambit of primary education, in order to better understand the challenges faced by this professional group in their classes. At the same time it is important to examine to what extent the delimitation of these competencies is present in current selection processes for access to public teaching. Determination of these competencies will also allow us to uncover the training needs required by teachers to effectively carry out their professional work (Campos & Martín, 2016).

As noted by Vicente (2018), few studies focus on the professional aptitudes of teachers and their inclusion in selection procedures. Thus, through this research we seek to add to this line of work, providing pedagogical information and knowledge adapted to current social and normative changes.
Further, reasons of a political nature can be highlighted which, at the same time, have motivated the decision to study this topic. In this sense, countries yearn to possess teaching staff who are passionate and responsible in their profession, and who have a well-trained skillset that they are willing to continually update. It is, therefore, not strange that in these moments concern about the quality of teaching is a constant in all European educational systems. In fact, a large part of the efforts of authorities responsible for this is dedicated to meeting the challenge described by both the Organisation for Cooperation and Economic Development (OCDE) and the European Union (UE). This has been summarised in three words: attract, train and retain teaching staff (Eurydice, 2005; OCDE, 2004).

This challenge at the heart of the UE, therefore, proposes implementation of a series of reforms, as much in initial training as ongoing training of teaching staff, in which new models of teaching professionalization are configured. In this way, emphasis is placed on the establishment of other additional conditions of teaching practice. These should be constituted of skills and abilities that bring greater dynamism and transversally to the current selection processes.

These premises make it possible to adopt a new methodological paradigm in the classroom which permits teaching staff to plan activities which offer diverse didactic methods that guarantee acquisition of a series of competences. Further, they encourage us to abandon the linear process of programming based on objectives, in favour of an updated vision of what teaching means (Díaz & Vicente, 2014).

Based on the information presented, scientific and political reasons justify an interest in developing, through the present research, an analysis of the degree to which professional competencies are used as a reference when selecting the candidates who will act as officials in the selection processes of physical education and musical education teachers. Directly collecting the necessary information from students, teachers, tribunal members, training providers and examiners permits better understanding about the current state of the educational system. At the same time, this serves as a reflexion for all of the agents involved (administration, teaching staff and student body, amongst others) regarding what is being taught, what is being learned and why.

**METHODS**

*Research design*

An approach is outlined that is descriptive (to identify the key elements or variables that exert influence upon the phenomenon under study) and explanatory (to examine the links between variables) in nature. In this way, it was not intended to produce generalised conclusions but, on the contrary, to limit selection to particular specific situations in which individuals act. In this way, the study of a set of tightly linked phenomenon within these individuals and within a concrete geographical environment is encouraged. This environment being the autonomous community of Andalusia.

In terms of the quality and validity of the research, triangulation (Colás, 1994) is outlined as the main tool of data analysis to be utilised in the present research. The three procedures of triangulation developed are: triangulation of information, internal triangulation and theoretical triangulation.

*Instruments for data collection*

The data obtained through the case study is achieved through analysis and interpretation of how study participants think, feel and act. The main task of the researcher was the collection and interpretation of this
data. To this end, and as has been referred to in the investigation techniques referred to, we used a normative literature review, semi-structured interview and a focus group as the main methodological tools.

Thus, we start from some initial categories constructed from the research questions themselves, this is then followed by a mixed procedure of deductive (based on the literary review) and inductive (through analysis of obtained data, once these had been classified according to units of significance) type. In this way, we trial different versions until a definitive set of categories is arrived at.

**Categorisation**
The categories selected to carry out this study are: DOC (factors that promote the quality of teaching), CURRIC (curriculum), COMP (professional competencies), SELECC (global approach to selective teacher selection tests), PRUEB1 (relates to the first test), PRUEB2 (relates to the second test), EXT (regards external factors) and OPN (regards its presence in the selective system).

**Participants**
For selection of the participant sample different personal and professional profiles were taken into account with the aim of collecting diverse and heterogeneous information. The following aspects were taken into account:

a) Official staff with more and less than 10 years of experiences, who have formed part of the selective processes as a tribunal member (this could include the meeting of the year 2017 or other meetings).
b) Official staff with more or less than 10 years of experience who have acted as a trainer of the selective process (this could include the meeting of the year 2017 or other meetings).
c) Official and interim personnel with more and less than 5 years of experience who have participated in different selective processes as a candidate (this could include the meeting of the year 2017 or other meetings).
d) Training assessors, linked to the implementation of the practical phase of the selective processes, in Teacher Training Centres (CEP).
e) Students in the final year of a Physical Education degree course who have shown an interest in participating in the selective processes of the year 2017.

Once these categories were delimited, prior probing of participants was conducted amongst known contacts, teaching friends and colleagues, and a first round of contact was initiated with each (including through direct measures or through different means of communication such as telephone calls or emails). This served to inform them about the fundamental aspects of the research. A high degree of interest and willing on behalf of all individuals invited to participate in the study is highlighted. However, the need to include the most varied and contrasting opinions possible, in order to favour a broad view of the issue, obliged us to specify a sample of two participants per category. This meant that from the set of invited participants (amongst them teachers of Physical Education and Musical Education who would have participated in selective processes, training providers linked to the practical phase, union representatives, trainers of the selective process and students registered on the degree of Primary Education with mention in Physical Education and Musical Education) fourteen were randomly and evenly selected.

Next, a face-to-face discussion occurred with the selected training staff and students, assuring confidentiality of their information and access to the resultant reports for their approval. Participants presented with a wide range of ages varying from 21 to 55 years (Me=39.7; SD=7.3) and, as previously reported, demonstrated great interest in collaborating with the research. Their experiences as Physical Education teachers ranged
from months for the most novice, to 35 years (Me=15.4; SD=8.2) for the most veteran, with some periods as general teachers also being included. The majority of interviewed teachers studied the speciality of Physical Education of Musical Education, except for those who studied teaching before this speciality had been introduced.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to carry out this report a description, analysis and interpretation of data was performed. This related, combined and established parallelisms between the outcomes that emerged from the normative literature review and those that arose from analysis of the interviews and the focus group. These in turn, were acquired using an inductive-deductive perspective conducted in four phases: summary of information in order to register it; classification and examination of the data obtained; categorisation and, finally, comparison of results.

Just as we can observe, our main intention whilst developing the analysis (descriptive and categorical) was to collect information about the perspectives and positions shown by the respondents. These related to teacher training, learning-teaching processes and what the student body really ends up learning. The purpose was to reflect on the most significant competency aspects of corporal expression in the context of Primary Education. Thus, programming and the act of programming, classroom routines, methodological sequencing, the content being dealt with, the focus on competencies of this content and access to the teaching profession, constituted the central categories from which this analysis was developed.

As a consequence of this analysis, we were able to obtain some conclusions in relation to approach, purpose and overall sense of the selective tests for teachers in the ambit of the autonomous community of Andalusia. From here we could observe that all of the participants interviewed agreed on one common aspect. This was that these tests were not adequate for the purpose for which they were conceived, this being optimal selection of candidates.

This shows that the teaching experience together with the educational practice itself seem to influence the perception held about the order of tests. Whilst, Elena, Mamen, Ricardo and Carmen held the opinion that the current order of tests (first, theoretical test of knowledge of the discipline together with a practical test and, finally, programming defence and didactic unit) presents a certain coherence, others such as Juan and José Manuel, propose starting testing with the purely practical aspects.

With regards to the types of tests that should be included within the process, José Manuel, Juan, Juan Ramón, Alejandro and Maite highlight the convenience of substituting the current first test that is theoretical in nature (development of a written topic), for a multiple-choice type test that encompasses a more global knowledge of the discipline and also facilitates greater objectivity when correcting it. However, Ricardo believes that this type of test would also present inconveniences. He planted doubt about its efficacy due to it not being able to evaluate aspects as important to the teaching function as writing, spelling and redaction (capacity for expression), amongst others. Given this approach we cannot observe a direct dependence between this aspect and the length of association with the teaching body. For example, individual's own experiences both as candidates and as tribunal members, will certainly have an influence even if only on their way of understanding the selective process.

This first test, as has been noted by Ana and Carmen, should contain a competency focus related with the teaching-learning process itself and specific didactic aspects alongside the strictly disciplinary aspects of
corporal expression (Campos & Martín, Op. Cit.). This is unlike the current content which, as defined by Juan, propose a series of "pure and hard" knowledge about the material that is normally technical in nature and is only demonstrated through one's capacity to memorise. This is to say, any given candidate can learn and redact a topic without the need to demonstrate any greater competencies. Further, the process itself of correcting this test emphasises this technical aspect (through the reproduction of content). Thus, José Manuel, Juan, Mamen, Juan Ramón and Ricardo (all of the members of the tribunal) claim to correct these tests following templates with clearly defined content, structure and presentation (all of the technical aspects). This, either individually or by reading out loud, enables classification of the candidates from one to 10 points in the presence of at least three tribunal members. It was even stated by Juan Ramón that to evaluate and voice opinions out loud about the object of the evaluation exercise creates interaction between the different members and, for this reason, means that the objectivity principle is not fulfilled.

Another highly significant aspect with respect to development of the test refers to the preparation of the tribunal members themselves. This was noted by José Manuel, Juan Ramón and Carmen, who intimated that the knowledge demonstrated by some members regarding the thematic itself was arguable, or better stated, entirely lacking. This brings into question the procedure itself of access of members to the tribunal and recognises that not all public teachers are qualified to carry out this function. Further, it was unanimously relayed by the interviewed tribunal members that the conditions for the correction of tests are clearly deficient with regards to timetables and working conditions (excessively long working days, excessive heat and a lack of means to mitigate it). This served only to worsen perspectives regarding the objectivity of this test to meet the purpose for which it was conceived. So the following questions arise: Why does the administration continue to maintain a random approach for choosing tribunal members? Why not also choose the most suitable criteria for this task? Why not take care of the climactic conditions in which these procedures are developed?

In this sense, the system should employ clear and explicit criteria for tribunal members rather than leaving this aspect to chance. This should be a fundamental element in the verification of the competencies of future teachers (Del Valle, De la Vega & Rodríguez, Op. Cit.). Relating to this aspect, as was stated by Ricardo, José Manuel, Alejandro and Juan Ramón, the administration could introduce a pool of accredited candidates who demonstrate solid experience and training in competencies, in addition to the necessary availability.

With regards to development of the practical part within this first test, unanimity exists relating to defending the need of candidates to be highly technically prepared in terms of skills and physical and corporal abilities. This has been maintained by López, Pérez, Manrique & Monjas, (Op. Cit.) who defended the need that exists for a practical test that permits us to verify the acquisition of physical-sport competencies related with development competencies of the material itself. The participants interviewed see this test as the ideal moment to be able to demonstrate their technical-practical knowledge (that which has been gained through initial training). Nevertheless, it is here where Carmen, José Manuel, Juan and Alejandro observe that the tests proposed by the administration do not irrefutably verify these competencies when they only deal with the determination of a written task. This makes obvious the importance of aspects such as physical and corporal skills. Further, these tests pose only basic technical difficulty, as stated by Ricardo. Any candidate with some initial knowledge can face these tests with a high probability of success. This shallow explication leads us to consider that the educational administration (charged with selecting and carrying out these tests) does not see better verification of professional competencies for Physical Education as necessary or does not judge it as convenient.
In the oral test (programming defence and exhibition of a didactic unit), Juan Ramón, Ricardo and Juan highlight the importance of verbally communicating and expressing the content of the didactic unit, as much as the curricular exhibitions contributed by the candidates. Thus, knowledge of curriculum standards was rated highly positively as one of the aspects on which the tribunal placed greater emphasis, alongside creative competence, originality and spontaneity. In their opinion it is the best way to see how the candidate manages to bring this content to students. It is in this moment where professional skills of candidates are rated through the didactic presentations they deliver. Although, as was commented by Juan Ramón, Mamen and José Manuel, these approaches are not always suited to the reality of the classroom (normally because this is not well known). Situations were explicitly referred to that were normally imaginary and had little in common with the educational realities found in practice. It is here where possible differentiation arises between the new candidates (who still have not had contact with the school) and the interim officials (who are already delivering teaching). In this case, José Manuel, Juan and Ricardo, more firmly propose the existence of a difference between the selective process and the real work taking place in the classroom. Thus, it is manifested that on the majority of occasions neither the materials, nor the expositions of the candidates themselves can be taken into the classroom. This is due to reasons relating to time pressures, lack of suitability to the pupils in question and actual programming needs, to a greater extent than the proposed activities themselves or the ability of candidates to reach students. Thus, following comments made by Juan Ramón, Ricardo, Mamen, Juan and José Manuel, aspects arose around the subjectivity and personal perceptions of tribunal members relating to this express knowledge of the observed educational reality. Other aspects included the need to debate amongst each other in a way that doubts or unusual aspects about the perception of these tests can be clarified, using a dialogue that reiterates the principles of objectivity and equality.

Further, consequences of excessively long working days (up to 12 hours) are a lack of optimal conditions in the reference centres and an overly brief action calendar that obliges individuals to work in non-objective conditions. As is argued by Juan, José Manuel and Ricardo, it is not the same to be examined first thing in the morning, as it is to be examined as the day advances or even in the afternoon. Neither are the first days of opposition the same as the last when tribunal members are already unsteadied as a consequence of exhaustion, excessive heat in the month of July or from the effort invested into listening and giving attention. Finally, other highlighted factors that were indicated to influence tribunal members include their own personality (level of empathy, firmness) or the fact of having to evaluate candidates who in many cases have come to be old degree colleagues or even work colleagues.

Juan Ramón and Ricardo reflect about the practical phase (carried out by the selected candidates in the educational centres once the selective process is overcome) and the possible variables (Aguilar-Parra, Álvarez & Lorenzo, Op. Cit.) that are established in relation to the type of centre in which they operate. They argue that what is suitable in a rural centre with a small number of motivated students is not the same as a centre on the outskirts with dysfunctional families and challenging student performance. In this sense, the principle of equality is also obvious for determining the presence of a multitude of inter-related factors in the learning-teaching process itself. These include the number of students per classroom and the motivation expressed by them, the type of centre and its location, the profile of the selected candidate and the difficulty in reaching them, and, of course, the concept of suitability.

Further, in this practical phase a complementary course is developed which is obligatory to attend. It is organised by the CEP (Centre of Teacher Education) and is 40 minutes in duration (10 in person and 30 online), together with follow-up by educational inspectors and the assigned tutor at the place of work. These are then responsible for completing a final report about suitability of the candidate to exercise in the teaching profession and for ratifying their qualification. As an examiner of CEP charged with this aspect Maite, reflects
that throughout the duration of the course emphasis is placed primarily on the methodological aspects (training of cooperative learning techniques, project based learning, emotional education for positive management in the classroom). These also constitute the most demanded aspects and are where reference is made, fundamentally, to what is currently regarded as good educational practice and is used to visualise real classroom situations that enable diffusion and internalisation in novice teachers. It is therefore recognised that this deals with the aspect that was most shown to be lacking within selected candidates in the current selective tests and for this reason is one of the main gaps in these procedures. Further, Carmen commented that this training course was somewhat sobering when it used the specific experiences and procedures of professionals as goals to achieve, running the risk of this turning into a recipe for success or a known “do it yourself” without taking into account the personal, social and affective constraints of centre location, typology, etc.

Finally, we highlight the following research proposals. The first could be to extend the research to a national scale with the intention of finding out whether the discussion and conclusions produced through this work are replicated in different autonomous communities. A second proposal could include other research designs, for example, quantitative designs and those that have a larger sample and are more representative, and that include closed questionnaires (amongst other tools) based on themes that arose during the present study.

Overall, the present research has enabled us to better understand the philosophy that drives selection of teaching staff and to identify where current teacher training actions for Physical Education are leading towards. Taking this as a starting point provides educational institutions with a basis from which they can develop a new model for selecting future teachers. A model configured from a qualitative standpoint that brings initial training and teacher experience together as a single reality capable of responding to the demands of future society.

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