

## KEY COMPETENCES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING IN MONTENEGRIN PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULA

Dijana Vučković<sup>1</sup>, Veselin Mićanović<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Philosophy – Nikšić, dijanav@ac.me

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Philosophy – vele-nk@t-com.me

### Abstract

This paper deals with the key competences for lifelong learning approach in Montenegrin curricula for primary school. Key competencies for lifelong learning represent essential elements for the systematic education of every individual in modern society and they should be included in educational programs even in the pre-school period. As for the primary schools and other educational levels, key competencies should represent one of the basic frameworks for the formulation of programs for each subject. The essence of these competences is transversal, i.e. their full development is possible only in the context of inter-subject correlation, integration of teaching areas or subjects. It is hardly possible that the realization and development of any of the eight key competencies for life-long learning can be successfully implemented in the domain of only one subject. Access to the development of competencies must have an inbetween relationship between the subjects in order for students to be exposed to the teaching concept that encourages their holistic development practically on each class.

The aim of this study is to identify the key program components related to the eight competencies - operational objectives and learning outcomes, access to specific competences (inter or cross-curricular). In this work we have utilised a descriptive research method. The analysis of pedagogical documentation (analysis of the curriculum) is applied as a research technique. The research results indicate that some key competencies are set out in the domain of special compulsory subjects (communication in mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, digital competence, social and civic competences), but also that the other subjects' curricula are open to a cross-curricular approach. Some competences (learning to learn, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression) are fully cross-curricular by nature. The next school year entrepreneurial learning will be introduced as a compulsory subject to all elementary schools.

**Keywords:** *key competencies, lifelong learning, curriculum, learning outcomes, cross-curricular approach.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Lifelong learning, in addition to binding documents, rules and regulations at the European level, has become an apparent inevitability of everyday working environment. In fact, whereas twenty years ago the completion of a formal (especially higher) education had meant the completion of the educational achievements of an individual and almost a guarantee that someone who is college-educated would successfully perform the professional tasks within the scope of his parent education, nowadays, it is pretty clear to everyone that the basic higher education provides a necessary basis for further extension of knowledge, skills, habits, attitudes, competencies during lifetime.

Some of the key competencies are in accordance with the didactic structure of individual subjects which have been included in the syllabus for many years. For example, mother tongue communication is by significant percentage compatible with the structure of the subject (mother tongue and literature) and, accordingly, it is normal to expect that it would be achieved within that subject for the most part. However, the content of the communication in the mother tongue still cannot be fully covered by a single subject. Some communication situations, concepts and contents fit into the contents and learning outcomes of other subjects more naturally. This is the case with other competences as well.

### **The System of Key Competencies**

In the previous period (before intensive educational reforms in European educational space), the term competence is mostly mentioned in relation to vocational education in order to provide description of specific and practical knowledge and skills that is expected of students by the labor market (Halász & Michel, 2011). However, after the 90s the term ‘competence’ is increasingly appearing in the curricula of many countries in the description of the skills, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, etc. Traditional curricula had to be changed in many respects due to the requirements of labor market of the new era, but also due to many other factors that were brought about by the globalization and contemporary economic and scientific and technological development.

The organization of OECD's research and other programs also participated on the global level in reformulating traditional curricula (which were basically the most substantial ones) to contemporary curricula which are more goal-oriented and in which almost necessarily appear competencies directly related to learning outcomes.

Pragmatic conception of education, orientation toward measurable learning outcomes, behaviorism and social constructivism represent a fundamental component of numerous changes which are used to enhance the effects of education on the individual and social level.

Curriculum reform was necessary in response to the vast amount of knowledge in science, engineering and technology. It has become quite clear to the creators of educational programs that it is impossible to train the young generations for proposed four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be (Delors, 1996) by insisting on the acquisition of the content (or by emphasizing the category of knowledge).

The European Reference Framework of Key Competences was defined in *the Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning* (2006) adopted by the Council and the European Parliament in December 2006. The following table (Table 1) provides a widely accepted model of the eight key competences for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2007).

Table 1.

Key competence	Definition
<b>Communication in the mother tongue</b>	<i>Communication in the mother tongue is the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in a full range of societal and cultural contexts; in education and training, work, home and leisure.</i>
<b>Communication in foreign languages</b>	<i>Communication in foreign languages broadly shares the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of societal and cultural contexts (in education and training, work, home and leisure) according to one's wants or needs. Communication in foreign languages also calls for skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding. An individual's level of proficiency will vary between the four dimensions (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and between the different languages, and according to that individual's social and cultural background, environment, need sand/or interests.</i>
<b>Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology</b>	<p>A) <i>Mathematical competence is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. Building on a sound mastery of numeracy, the emphasis is on process and activity, as well as knowledge. Mathematical competence involves, to different degrees, the ability and willingness to use mathematical modes of thought (logical and spatial thinking) and presentation (formulas, models, constructs, graphs, charts).</i></p> <p>B) <i>Competence in science refers to the ability and willingness to use the body of knowledge and methodology employed to explain the natural world, in order to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions. Competence in technology is viewed as the application of that knowledge and methodology in response to perceived human wants or needs. Competence in science and technology involves an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and responsibility as an individual citizen.</i></p>
<b>Digital competence</b>	<i>Digital competence involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.</i>
<b>Learning to learn</b>	<i>Learning to learn is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organize one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. This competence includes awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. This competence means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life</i>

	<i>experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts: at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual's competence.</i>
<b>Social and civic competences</b>	<i>These include personal, interpersonal and intercultural competence and cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.</i>
<b>Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship</b>	<i>Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports individuals, not only in their everyday lives at home and in society, but also in the workplace in being aware of the context of their work and being able to seize opportunities, and is a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance.</i>
<b>Cultural awareness and expression</b>	<i>Appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts.</i>

Competencies are defined as dynamic combinations of knowledge, skills and attitudes. For each of the competencies the elements of knowledge, skills and acquired attitudes were presented. Key competences are those which all individuals need for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment (European Commission, 2007). All of them are equally important because each in its own way contributes to the quality of the life of individuals and participates in the development of the society. In education, the emphasis should be placed on: critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking and constructive management of feelings, so that the system of key competencies was comprehensively developed.

The above-mentioned competencies can be for the most part achieved within specific subjects such as, for example: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, IT, communication in mathematics, etc. but it is likely that the demand for the development of specific competencies excel the objectives and organization of any specific subject. In most of the documents it is pointed out that the first three competencies are closely related to educational outcomes of traditionally existing subjects, while the others are mainly cross-curricular.

However, if we sort out only one of the competencies, for example - communication in the mother tongue (which is defined very broadly and includes a variety of communication situations), we become aware from the programs and textbooks that still the main focus is on learning grammar and orthography of the mother tongue, which is one of the elements of competence, but its meaning is far from being overused by learning linguistic regularities. Communication in the mother tongue is a very wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that comprise the most diverse activities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. For example, just within the PISA reading literacy, four very different situations of reading: reading for private and public use, reading for learning purpose and reading for pleasure (v.

*Literacy Skills*, 2003, p. 37) are defined. As for the writing process, many types of writing can be differentiated - creative writing, the writing of the various public announcements, non-creative academic articles, reports or writing which involves answering the various tasks (questions) according to the established criteria. As part of all these and many other non-listed activities, all students are expected to understand the purpose and the goal of reading (writing) and to establish linguistic communication through all these activities.

Also, most of the verbal material (lessons from the majority of subjects) that students acquire is written in their native language. Communication of students with the teaching materials is quite different type of activity from those typically achieved within the content of the subject concerning mother tongue and literature.

### **Development of Key Competencies in Montenegrin Primary School System**

Montenegrin educational system started with reform process in 2001.

The basic document that outlines the necessary reforms is the *Book of Changes* (2001). The system flaws are clearly highlighted and the suggestions for changes are given in the Book of Changes. Among other things, the reform includes: the democratization of school, the stronger bonds with the local community, individualization of instruction (having the elective and optional subjects and by some others ways), social inclusion, greater parental involvement in the school's way of operating, changing the teaching methodology (the lecturing classes should give place to the exploration, problem solving, experimental classes), changing the curriculum (the curriculum rich in contents should be replaced with the target planning curriculum), a clear correlation to integrate contents of various subjects (thematic and modular planning of the units), encouraging the teamwork, cooperation and interaction, the use of diverse sources of knowledge, the changes in requirements evaluation – from those in recognition of good memory ability, to those of encouraging the development of thinking ... ( *The Book of Changes*, 2001). Most of the elements previously mentioned are directly related to the pragmatic conception of education, social constructivism and behaviorism.

Based on the *Book of Changes*, the new curricula are written. The starting point for the new planning are the operational objectives, teaching and learning outcomes. The Analysis of the operational objectives clearly shows that the pragmatic knowledge, skills, habits and attitudes are required. However, the debatable issue has always been the questionable willingness of schools to adopt the previously mentioned trend of changes.

The Research conducted in 2008 (Backović, Vučurović, Lalovic, 2008), among other things, includes the achievement of some teaching objectives, such as: the development of cooperation among students, the acquisition of applicable knowledge, development of communication skills, combining the knowledge from various subjects, development of

problem solving skills. The results show that education is improved in some domains (for example, co-operation, the applicability of knowledge acquired, communication), but they also show that, for example, the correlation between the subjects and solving the problems are not at the desired level of success.

More complex research process was conducted by the end of 2012. (Reškovac, Bešić, 2012). Some of the specific teaching objectives in the study were predominantly analyzed: active learning, critical thinking, communication skills and teamwork. The values of the specific objectives in scores (ranging from 0 to 1) are: 0.47 for active learning, 0.41 for critical thinking and communication skills and 0.38 for teamwork (Reškovac, Bešić, 2012, p.7). Hence, the values that may not be satisfactory are questioned. The researchers point out that the dominant teaching activities of teachers and all methodological elements derived from them and are in a direct relation to them are still in usage.

As for the competence of democratic citizenship, which is also included in the research already mentioned, the results are far from desirable. The observation of the classes in the elementary school has the score of 0.03, and the score in the curriculum for primary school is 0,002. However, the authors of the study still refrain from the results and this attitude may be justified by the sample and the instruments that are used in study.

Within the chapter *The Objectives in The Book of Changes* (*The Book of Changes*, 2001: 23) the most notable is the tendency to promote the lifelong learning:

"Education should be:

- a promoter of development altogether with science and technology,
- developing in the direction of supporting the inclusion and participation activities at all levels and fields of work and activity,
- a field where the needs, interests, desires and ambitions of individuals who are educated are satisfied,
- be organized in that way that an individual is provided with the foundation for the development of freedom of opinion and conscious mental activity. "

Based on *The Book of Changes*, the curriculum for primary schools is defined and, within the curriculum plan, there are three groups of subjects: mandatory, elective and optional.

For competencies: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages , mathematical competence and competence in science and technology (IT) and some special (different) subjects that develop each of them individually. All these subjects have the status of being mandatory, except for English which is in a group of optional subjects during the

period that includes the first three grades, but from the fourth grade it becomes a mandatory subject and is being studied within the fund of three classes a week.

**Communication in mother tongue** is predominantly developed within the Montenegrin-Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian Language and Literature subject. The subject curriculum (2011), within the framework of the general objectives and learning outcomes, particularly emphasizes the communication competencies in the mother tongue and learning to learn, but the need for more comprehensive and coherent development of other competencies is (especially through the sections on correlation and through the operational objectives ) Within the language field, the reading of variety of non-creative (continuous and discontinuous) texts is envisaged , and one of the first tasks of their analysis is to determine the structure of the text , to separate the important from the less important data in their classification schemes and charts , to identify cause- and –effect relations and other relations and correlations, to understand the intent or purpose of the text, etc, all of which is related to the competence of learning to learn . Also, the program emphasizes the project work with the students, the development of their critical thinking (a numerous RWCT techniques and strategies are mentioned in the activities proposed), a learning through the problem solving and creativity. Native language is a mandatory subject in primary schools. In the first cycle, five classes of native language are held a week.

The subject of non-creative texts, which are envisaged for reading and the analysis, are very diverse. The texts are about the different fields of natural and social environment and are suitable for reading and research project activities, direct students to additional sources of knowledge. Through the analysis of these texts, the teachers of the mother tongue have the opportunity to engage in the development of almost all of the eight key competences. However, the question of great importance is the level they see themselves at, when it comes to their ability to manage to act in a more comprehensive and methodological way. During the basic studies, they are highly specialized for teaching native language and literature.

On the other hand, the curriculum, in the terms of conceptual and substantial, prevents them from involving in the development of competencies and students' way of thinking and accepting the fact that the focus of interest is not only the sheer memorizing of rules. In fact, the curriculum emphasizes a very large number of concepts, facts, data, rules, etc, which are obligatory for students to acquire. The grammar of the mother tongue is taught in elementary school to the very details, and the large number of spelling rules and the literary and functional terms are also envisaged to acquire. The fact that in some situations there is uneven distribution of terms by grades or that the gradual and systematic principle is violated represents a special difficulty. Also, in relation to the curriculum, the authors of the textbooks mainly add more content, so that the students are obviously still more focused on the reproductive than on the productive, creative activities.

The reform has also paid special attention to **communication in foreign languages**, and the intensifying of these competencies is becoming increasingly available. Reformed Primary

School has lasted for nine years and it is organized into three-year cycles. An obligatory elective subject (English language) is already introduced in the first cycle, in the first grade. From the fourth grade English Language is a mandatory subject. As for the third cycle, one of the obligatory elective subjects, with a three-hour weekly fund is the second foreign language. Students choose which language to learn: Italian, German, French or Russian. Learning two foreign languages continued throughout high school. The curricula has provided correlation for these subjects with the rest of the teaching plan, and as for the methodical recommendations which are related to teachers – they are in need for more often and stronger correlations, and that is why the integration approach to processing information is emphasized in the curricula whenever possible. This means that teachers of different subjects are able to perform some of the contents through teamwork and that they can work together in one or more classes (e.g. a teacher of geography and a teacher of foreign language work at the same in the class).

**Mathematical competence and competencies in science and technology** also have special subjects. Mathematics is a compulsory subject in primary schools and beside the mother tongue, that is the subject that has the greatest fund of classes a week. Traditional approach to the study of mathematics content, regardless of certain innovations brought by the curriculum (Subject Curriculum Mathematics, 2011), is still very much present in the teaching education. Even in text-books there is no sufficient incentive towards the development of mathematical literacy in wider means. There are too many similar tasks, while problem-solving tasks are rare and reduced to identification of several typical solving forms. Situations presented in the text-books are mostly methodological constructs- there is too little connection with the realistic, practical situations which need the appliance of mathematical knowledge.

Subjects whose contents derive from a variety of natural and social sciences, in the first cycle are represented within the program for Nature and Society (2009), in order to get to a stratification of cases in the second and especially the third cycle, out of which the following have been gradually allocated: History, Geography, Biology, Ecology, Physics, Chemistry, Technology with informatics. And these are essentially the subjects that exist in traditional Montenegrin educational system. The only exception is the study of computer science in elementary school, and up to the reform, there was a subject of working and technical education instead. Mentioned programs, as numerous studies have shown (see Reškovic, Bešić, 2012), are loaded with still a quite affluent collection of facts that need to be acquired. Thus, teaching focus is still on knowledge transfer, and not on students' opinion development. The workload of teaching by a large data and concept number practically prevents problem-solving learning, project work and other contemporary teaching models.

The literacy (reading, mathematical and scientific) observed in PISA research is basically associated with the previously mentioned competencies and even though the program has various elements that we can identify as directly aimed at their development, the results of Montenegrin students on PISA research, however, are not nearly as satisfactory. One of the

possible causes could certainly be methodological unreadiness of the teacher for their realization. Therefore, despite the significant curriculum innovation related to the PISA literacy (Vučković, 2011), it is necessary to make more steps towards successful implementation of practical teaching. Even the result of external testing (which contain many elements of the PISA conception) do not sound encouraging.

As for the other competencies, they should be developed mainly cross-curricular.

For **Social and civic competences** in the Montenegrin educational system, subject Civic Education has been introduced in the sixth and seventh grade, which basically refers to the EDC-HRE (Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education). Within the subject, various concepts related to democracy, citizenship, human rights and obligations etc., are being taught. It was initially planned that the essence of the case is resolved by methodological design method, given that the theoretical basis is found in the work of John Dewey and his followers. The practice is still not producing satisfactory results. However, there are many various activities conducted on the implementation of civic education, the democratization of the school, its co-operation with the local community, respect for the rights of all participants in the educational process, inclusive education, etc., so it is almost obvious that this competence was considered extremely important for the educational process.

For the **entrepreneurial competence** for the school year 2014-2015 in the curriculum for primary school there will be one-term compulsory subject Entrepreneurial learning. After a series of programs and projects which had the promotion of importance of the mentioned competency as their main goal, there has come to a formulating of the compulsory subject.

One of the projects that preceded the introduction of such subject is *Entrepreneurial learning in non-economic faculties*. Learning outcomes for students of such universities have been identified and numerous attempts to broaden the understanding of this competency have been made, as well as its accomplishment that would be aligned with the definition (see Batarelo-Kokić et al. 2013; Heather et al. 2011). In fact, there still is a tendency towards narrowing the understanding of entrepreneurial competence since it is primarily viewed as an economic and business concept.

The competence **learning to learn** was initially planned to be introduced through the subject of Montenegro and the Serb-Croat-Bosnian language and literature, primarily in the field of language teaching. Namely, the linguistic rules are adopted by the non-artistic texts, and metalinguistic analysis (ie. analysis of grammatical and orthographic text plan) is just one of many types of analysis. In addition, it provides for the realization of the analysis: the intention and purpose, causal, contextual and others. It was planned that by reading the non-artistic text, students learn how to read by reading. By the adequate methodological procedures students are referred to finding specific information in the text, to separate the important from the unimportant (less important) to produce diagrams and charts, the different

conceptual maps and networks, mind maps (Vučković, 2010). Therefore, one of the tasks of reading the non-artistic text could be its restructuring from the linear verbal forms to an organized graphical form. The students are being given different types of tasks and questions about the non-artistic text. It would be necessary to take into account the levels of cognitive taxonomy and endeavor often set tasks with higher taxonomic levels.

**Cultural awareness and expression** as a whole is of cross-curricular character. It is most firmly associated with the teaching of language, history, art and civics.

### **Conclusion and the proposed measures**

The reforms of the Montenegrin educational system initiated in 2001. by the Book of Changes included the majority of the segments of teaching in primary school. The basic postulate of the Book of Change is the *school remembering into school of thought*. In that context, the initiation of progressive and contemporary methodological-didactic concepts is evident, and thereby a shift of focus of the educational process towards the learning outcomes understood as a dynamic combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

As mentioned before, it is hardly possible that the realization and development of any of the eight key competencies for life-long learning can be successfully implemented in the domain of only one subject. For instance, in math class, in addition to the central competence that is achieved, it is possible in many ways to develop language competences of students through, for example, textual analysis, analysis of problem-solving tasks. Likewise, in math class, the ICT literacy is being successfully developed if a software package such as GeoGebra etc. is being used. Entrepreneurial competencies easily fits in Mathematics as well. Children could resolve different kinds of computational tasks. For instance, the task could refer to the estimate of money needed for the trip, excursion, organizing birthday parties and similar.

The curricula for the elementary school represents a solid starting point for the development of LLL, but more activities for their innovation are needed such as the following:

- to specify the competencies as defined (to state the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes and their clear connection to certain competencies) in the learning outcomes;
- programs should be *free* of excess fact and theory (concepts) and be more oriented toward learning, learning outcomes, project and teamwork, cooperative activities of students;
- an important focus of the program would have to be on correlation, as well as the integration of subject areas and content to make the cross-curricular approach more clear;
- it is essential to emphasize the elements of LLL competencies for each individual program within the general and specific objectives;

- it is important for class and subject teachers to have an ongoing professional training and further training of teaching approach based on learning outcomes, which clearly identifies the key competences for lifelong learning.

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