



## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL EDUCATION AND COMPETENCE-ORIENTED EDUCATION – OPINION OF STUDENTS FROM PEDAGOGICAL DISCIPLINES

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**Abstract:** The study explores the differences between traditional education (TE) and competence-oriented education (COE) from the perspective of students enrolled in pedagogical disciplines at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov.” In the context of Bulgarian educational modernization, COE is increasingly recognized as a dynamic alternative to the static and authoritarian methods of TE. The research employs a qualitative survey with open-ended questions, allowing 32 students from preschool and primary school pedagogy programs to freely express their opinions after completing the course “Development of scientific and social competences.” The findings reveal that TE is perceived as centralized, theoretical, and focused on rote memorization, with limited practical application, weak dialogue, and low motivation. In contrast, COE is associated with flexibility, active participation, critical thinking, project-based learning, and the acquisition of lasting skills relevant to real-life situations. Students emphasize the role of the teacher as a facilitator who encourages collaboration, dialogue, and creativity. Criticisms of the current Bulgarian system include excessive theoretical training, outdated methods, lack of digitalization, insufficient attention to mental health, and an overloaded schedule that negatively affects motivation and well-being. The study concludes that a systemic transformation is necessary, shifting from formal, authoritarian practices toward a competence-oriented model that ensures sustainable development, higher motivation, and better preparation of young people for professional and civic life.

**Keywords:** *competence, competence approach, traditional education, competence-oriented education, differences.*

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### INTRODUCTION

In modern pedagogical theory and practice, the competence approach is established as one of the most dynamically developing directions. In the Bulgarian context, its introduction is directly related to the processes of modernization aimed at preparing school students for real life, at building self-determination skills and at forming readiness to perform a wide range of social and personal functions.

This trend leads to a change in the way the results of the educational process are assessed. Traditional categories such as “education”, “upbringing” and “preparedness” are gradually giving way to new concepts – “competence”. As M. Mohzana emphasizes in his study, education in the 21st century “has increasingly focused on equipping students with competences that extend beyond content memorization” [1]. Competence-oriented education is not an entirely new phenomenon and is not foreign to the Bulgarian educational tradition. One of the main objectives of the Law on Pre-school and School Education is precisely “the acquisition of competences necessary for successful personal and professional realization and active civic life in contemporary communities” [2]. This outlines a strategic task for the

development of education – updating content and teaching methods and achieving a new quality of results.

In view of this, there is a need to study the perceptions of students in teacher training programs – the future teachers who will be the agents of change. Their opinions on the differences between traditional and competence-oriented education provide valuable information on the direction of the system's development and the need for a comprehensive transformation towards a more flexible, supportive, and real-skills-oriented educational environment.

### METHODOLOGY

The research focus of this study is aimed at tracking the opinions of students studying in pedagogical specialties at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov” regarding the differences between traditional education and competence-oriented education in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The main tasks of the study are:

- to reveal the theoretical aspects of the concepts: competence, competence approach, competence-oriented education

- to investigate the opinions of students – future educators regarding the differences between traditional education and competence-oriented education in the Republic of Bulgaria
- to analyze the results obtained.

The survey uses qualitative questions aimed at investigating the personal opinions of the students. The questions are open, without pre-set judgments or answers, which allows participants to freely express their views, experiences and attitudes. The research method is a survey, with the emphasis on the qualitative analysis of the data obtained.

Using the survey method, data were collected and analyzed on the opinions of students studying in pedagogical specialties and studying the discipline “Development of scientific and social competences” regarding the main differences between traditional education and competence-oriented education in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The study was carried out with a partially standardized author’s survey, including six closed and open questions. This scientific paper presents part of this study. A total of 32 students from the specialties “Preschool Pedagogy”, “Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy”, in which the discipline “Development of scientific and social competencies” is mandatory for study in the curriculum, participated in the survey. The survey was conducted after the completion of the lecture course on the discipline.

## DISCUSSION

Before considering the essence of competence-oriented education (COE), it is necessary to clarify the content of the concept of “competence” and “competence approach”, since it is competence that is at the heart of this approach.

In the scientific literature, there are numerous definitions that reflect different theoretical and practical perspectives. What they have in common is the emphasis on the individual’s ability to integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes and to apply them effectively in a variety of situations.

In the European Qualifications Framework competence is defined as “the demonstrated ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological assets in work or learning situations and in professional and personal development” [3].

John Raven, in his book “Competence in Modern Society,” defines the term “components of competence” as “characteristics and abilities of people that allow them to achieve personally significant goals, regardless of the nature of those goals and the social structure in which they live and work” [4]. There are numerous definitions of the concept of “competence approach” in the academic research, which can be reduced to a similar definition by Khutorsky, according to whom the formation of key competencies in learners as a result of the educational process is called a competency approach [5]. According to Spencer and Spencer, the competence approach emphasizes the validity of the criteria: it is important that they actually lead to the best performance of the activity, and not be limited to factors that simply describe the characteristics of the person in the hope that some of them will be relevant to the results [6].

Competence-oriented education has established itself as one of the most significant trends in pedagogical theory and

practice in recent decades. It appears in various forms, and the term and concept have been actively used since the 1960s.

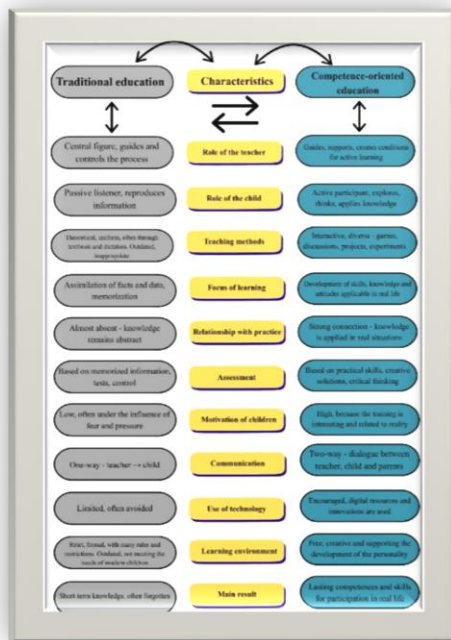
The analysis of pedagogical literature shows that there is no unified opinion on the concept of COE. Different authors define it in different ways – some emphasize the practical applicability of knowledge, others on the development of key skills and attitudes, and still others associate it with the change of the educational paradigm in modern society. According to J. Gervais, it is precisely this diversity of interpretations that creates a need for conceptual clarity. Therefore, she finds it imperative to create a universal definition of COE, which would provide a common theoretical framework and facilitate its practical application in different educational contexts. After a thorough review of the scientific literature, he defines competence-oriented education as an outcome-based approach that includes methods of teaching and assessing the quality of education through the demonstration by learners of knowledge, attitudes, values, skills and behavioral patterns consistent with the standard for the relevant stage or level of education. She also emphasizes that the theoretical foundations of COE are found in learning theory, which shows the relationship between pedagogical concepts and their practical application [7]. According to S. Velikova competence-oriented education provides a sustainable foundation for the formation of key skills of the 21st century, necessary for full participation in social and economic life in conditions of challenges, uncertainty and new opportunities [8].

A. Tarmo and A. Kimaro examine competence-oriented education in the context of human resource management. According to them, this model is a key factor in the transformation of the education system, as it prepares graduates for the upcoming challenges of the labor market [9]. The theoretical review outlines the main characteristics of competence-oriented education. In order to clarify the extent to which these ideas are reflected in the Bulgarian educational system, the opinion of students of pedagogical disciplines at Burgas State University “Prof. Dr. Assen Zlatarov”, Republic of Bulgaria, was surveyed for differences between traditional education and competence-oriented education.

## FINDINGS

As part of a survey conducted among students of pedagogical disciplines, information was collected regarding their perceptions of the differences between traditional and competency-oriented education. **Figure 1** presents the main differences between the two types of education, summarized by key characteristics. The table groups these features into thematic areas, derived through a meaningful analysis of the students' responses, which reflect their personal observations and critical attitude towards existing educational practices.

**Figure 1.** Differences between traditional education and competence-oriented education



**Source:** Blaga Dimova. All rights reserved

Several significant results can be derived from the table, which reflect the students' perceptions of the differences between the two educational approaches. According to them, traditional education is characterized by centralized management, a passive role of the student, theoretical and uniform teaching methods, and a weak connection with practice. Assessment in it is formal and oriented towards memorizing content, and communication between teacher and student is one-way and often subject to authority. Motivation is usually low, often influenced by fear and external control, and the acquired knowledge is short-lived and easily forgotten.

On the other hand, competence-oriented education is perceived as more flexible, engaging and tailored to the individual needs of school students. They emphasize the importance of active participation, critical thinking, project work and the application of knowledge in real-life situations. In this model, the teacher plays the role of a facilitator who supports learning through dialogue, collaboration and the creation of a stimulating environment. Teaching methods are interactive and varied, incorporating games, teamwork and practical activities that strengthen the connection between theory and practice. Assessment is competency-oriented and two-way, involving both teacher and school student, while communication is dialogic and encourages mutual respect. Motivation is high, driven by relevance and interest, and the main outcome is the acquisition of lasting competencies and skills that prepare students for participation in real life.

Against the background of the distinction between traditional and competency-oriented education, it was important to establish what criticisms future educators make of the current education system in the Republic of Bulgaria. In order to monitor the extent to which current practices meet contemporary pedagogical principles and expectations according to students, the

question was investigated: **“What do you dislike about the current education system in Bulgaria?”**. Participants had the opportunity to freely express their opinion through open-ended qualitative questions. The analysis of their answers outlined a number of systemic problems that, according to future educators, hinder effective learning and student development.

Main problems identified by students:

- Excessive theoretical training

The learning process is oriented towards memorization without ensuring practical application of knowledge.

- Rote learning instead of understanding

Students often memorize information mechanically without making sense of it, which leads to superficial knowledge.

- Early start of the school day

According to students, this leads to fatigue, lack of concentration and difficulty in understanding the material.

- Heavy backpacks and an overloaded schedule

Physical and mental strain negatively affects students' health and motivation.

- Too many rules and restrictions

Strict regulations suppress creativity and freedom of expression.

- Fear and tension in the classroom

Lack of trust between students and teachers leads to difficult communication and fear of expressing an opinion.

- Outdated teaching methods

Insufficient use of innovative approaches and technologies makes training ineffective and boring.

- Lack of young staff

The predominance of older teachers who have difficulty accepting changes makes it difficult to modernize the system.

- Lack of dialogue between teacher and student

Weak feedback and one-way communication lead to alienation and demotivation.

- Excessive homework and test workload

Students are subjected to constant stress, which negatively affects their mental health.

- Early career choice

The requirement to choose a profile after the 7th grade is premature and does not take into account the maturity of students.

- Insufficient practical training

There is a lack of projects, experiments and extracurricular activities that develop real skills.

- Formal assessment

The system measures momentary knowledge without taking into account the progress and competencies of students.

- Lack of digitalization and innovation

Teachers rarely use modern technologies, which limits access to current resources.

- Insufficient attention to mental health

The emotional state of students often remains neglected, although it is key to their development.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the opinions of future teachers outlines a number of systemic weaknesses in the current education system of the Republic of Bulgaria. The main criticisms are directed at excessive theoreticality, mechanical learning, outdated teaching methods, and the lack of practical orientation. Additionally, factors such as the early start of the school day, the overloaded program, heavy backpacks, and excessive homework create physical and mental stress, which negatively affects the motivation and health of students.

The lack of dialogue between teacher and school student, the absence of young staff and insufficient attention to mental health further deepen the problems and lead to alienation and low efficiency of education. Insufficient digitalization and innovation limit access to modern resources and opportunities for the development of competencies needed in real life.

All this shows that the existing system needs a complete transformation from formal and authoritarian-oriented education to a more flexible, competency-oriented, and supportive environment. As Y. Butova notes, any form of competence-oriented education, updated according to the needs of modern society, is establishing itself as a dynamic alternative to the static and outdated methods of the traditional approach [10]. Such a change would ensure higher motivation, lasting knowledge, and skills, as well as better compliance with modern pedagogical principles and students' needs. In this context, competency-oriented education emerges as the most promising alternative, capable of guaranteeing sustainable development of education and successful preparation of young people for the challenges of life and their professional realization.

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