E-competencies of the Tutor in E-learning - A Comparative Study

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Abstract. The E-learning system requires more competencies then the ones from traditional education. In Romania this E-learning system is just born and the status of the tutor is unclear. The tutor does not have a clear psycho-pedagogical profile. In this paper we present a quantitative and qualitative comparative research between Romania, Western-Europe and America with the emphasis on the competencies needed for a tutor in the E-learning context of Romania.

Keywords: e-learning, pedagogy, competencies, tutor

1 Introduction

In a society based on knowledge which is in a permanent economical, social and educational changing it is necessary to have qualified people who can face the competitive economy. In Romania as in Europe the job markets require a "*qualified personal with a high level of preparation*"[1], people who will face the needs of the permanent technical changing. In the E-learning system the tutors play a key role. According to some dictionaries[2] the tutors are the *teachers charged with the instruction and guidance of another in a private way or in a university*. They are the interface between institution and students. Because in Romania this E-learning system is just born the status of the tutor is unclear. The Ministry of Education in Romania does not recognize this occupation even if the E-learning system is already in place and people actually perform this occupation. The tutor does not have a clear psycho-pedagogical profile which can help him to work not as a volunteer but as a *qualified teacher*. The identity of a tutor is better understood when his/her competencies necessary in the E-learning context are described. Therefore, this paper is trying to define the key competencies of a tutor in E-learning for the specific context of Romania.

E-learning system requires from tutors specific competencies. According to the *International Board of Standards for Training Performance and Instruction*[3] a competence implies a set of knowledge, abilities and attitudes which a person can efficiently perform in such a way then he/she can attend the expected standards. A competence is more then knowledge. Besides knowledge it is necessary a capacity to do what a person already knows.

[1] www.portal.edu.ro
[2] www.stars21.com/dictionary/English-English_dictionary.html, www.brothersoft.com/.../longman-dictionary-online.html, www.merriam-webster.com/
[3] www.ibstpi.org

The tutors in E-learning, especially in Romania, are coming with a '*baggage*' of competencies already formed from the traditional system of learning. The E-learning system requires more competencies then the ones from traditional education. To define the e-competencies which a tutor should have, many researchers [6, 8] and authors of the professional teacher standards[4] begin from the classification of three functions of the tutor, namely: pedagogical, psycho-social and managerial. It is interesting to observe that some authors [1, 9] besides these competencies identified the fourth function of a tutor, the technical one. Another classification is given by Theodore C. Smith [3] who begins from the idea that the competencies for an online instructor should be built in function of the three phases of the online course: *competencies needed prior to start a course, competencies needed during the course, competencies after the course*. We decided to combine the two classifications -fact that is novel in itself- and try to divide the competencies both according to the different phases of the course and the main dimensions of the tutor (pedagogical, psycho-social, managerial, technical). We tried to validate this classification via quantitative and qualitative research which results are presented here. Moreover we also show which specific competencies are relevant for the situation of Romania.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section formulates more precisely the research question and the goals of the research. It presents the quantitative and qualitative studies and the sampling of the research. Section 3 presents the principal results and the interpretation of the results. Then the conclusions follow.

2 Description of the problem

Problem formulation: The psycho-pedagogical activity of a tutor from E-learning system is a new reality from a couple of years ago in Romania. Although the universities outside of Romania are making efforts to have an academic profile of a tutor [6], in Romania the tutor does not have a clear psycho-pedagogical profile. The problem that we investigate can be formulated in the following question: *What is the psycho-pedagogical profile of a tutor in E-learning that will be suitable for Romania educational context?*

Goal of the research: Derived from the problem formulation the goal of this research can be identified targeted to the electronic educational system of Romania compared with similar systems from other countries:

- *What are the competencies of a tutor in E-learning which could give him/her a clear statute?*
- *How is the proposed classification validated by the E-learning practice?*

Quantitative and qualitative study: We did both the quantitative and qualitative research to have a broad picture of the competencies needed for a tutor in E-learning. The questionnaire used questions with single or multiple-choice to which we added Linkert or Adorno scales. The major subjects of the questions are: *traditional curriculum versus online curriculum, role of the tutor, tutor competencies, evaluation methods*. For the qualitative research we have used *two individual semi-structured interviews for tutors*. The major subjects of the

[4] ww.sreb.org, www.lluk.org/documents/app_prof_standards_literacy_esol.pdf

questions from the interview are: *role of the tutor, short history of the tutor in university, online tutoring, tutor competencies, tutor training*. Although we investigated more aspects, in this paper we will treat only the competencies because this is one of the central aspects for e-tutoring and of course because of the limitations of paper size.

Sampling: The type of sampling that we used was *snowball* [2]. We have a questionnaire for tutors from *Romania* (SNSPA, ASE, Politechnics Bucharest), *Western Europe* (Holland/Open Univ., Finland/Oulu Univ., Slovenia/Mariboru Univ.), *United States of America* (AVLN, Loma Linda Univ.). There were in total *76* tutors. For the *interviews* we have used tutors from: *Finland* (Oulu Univ), *Romania* (SNSPA, ASE, Polytechnic, ISE - Bucharest), *Philippine* (AI-IAS Univ.), *Turkey* (Anadolu Univ.), U.S. (AVLN, Loma Linda, North Caroline Univ.). There were *21* tutors.

3 Interpreting of the results

From the questionnaire applied to the tutors we deducted that the tutors agreed with the classification of the competencies for the three phases of the course.

Competencies before the start a course. The majority of the investigated tutors agreed with the following competencies needed for the time of preparation of a course (see the Table 1).

Table 1. Relevant competencies in the process of the preparation of the course.

Competencies in the process of the preparation of the course	**Ro**		**UE**		**US**	
	Nr.	**%**	**Nr.**	**%**	**Nr.**	**%**
Capacity to select the best technology for the course	26	*92*	33	*94*	10	*76*
Capacity to create an efficient program	13	*46*	30	*85*	10	*76*
Capacity to offer clear expectances of the course	25	*89*	35	*100*	12	*92*

Competencies during the course. Only 37 % from the investigated tutors (U.S.) consider the collaborative learning as a good activity during the course, in comparison with the tutors from EU who have a high percentage (97 %) regarding this item (see fig. 1).

Competencies at the end of the course. Regarding the last set of competencies we saw some differences between Romanian universities (50 %) and EU (82 %) regarding the capacity of the tutor to keep the confidentiality of the results of the students at the end of the course. For all tutors the capacity to give the right feedback at the end of the course has a high percentage (Ro – 92 %, EU – 97 %, US – 76 %).

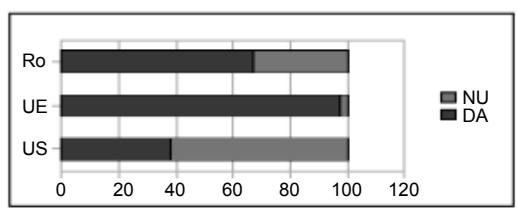

Fig. 1. Competencies during the course.

In the Table 2 we present the final results in which we sum up the principal competencies from quantitative and qualitative research.

Table 2. Tutor competencies derived from the questionnaire and interviews.

Courses phase	Competencies	Pedagogical	Psycho-social	Managerial	Technical
Competencies before the start of the course	Capacity to select the best technology for the course	**X**			
	Capacity to create an efficient program			**X**	
	Capacity to offer clear expectances of the course	**X**			
	Capacity to plan the online activities	**X**			
	Capacity to use the virtual system of learning (Moodle, SAKAI, Desire2Learn, Blackboard)				**X**
Competencies during the course	Capacity to have empathy for students		**X**		
	Capacity to make clear the expectances of the activities of learning	**X**			
	Capacity to communicate through a short, simple and intelligent message		**X**		
	Capacity to promote collaborative learning	**X**			
	Capacity to promote the best motivation for students in the learning process		**X**		
	Capacity to promote technics for an active learning	**X**			
	Capacity to give quickly and good feedback	**X**			
	Capacity to initiate and conduct the online discussions with the students			**X**	
	Capacity to offer technical help if it is necessary				**X**
Competencies at the end of the course	Capacity to give feedback at the end of the course into the final evaluation	**X**			
	Capacity to keep the confidency regarding the work of the students		**X**		

4 Conclusions

From the research done, we deducted that the tutors agree with the classification of the competencies according to the three phases of an E-learning course. For each phase the competencies are divided into the four principal functions of the tutor. In the specific literature we can see that the four functions of the tutor are coming from the roles of him. They are many classifications of the roles of a tutor but one is recognized by the most researchers in online education [4, 5, 1, 3, 9] as being appropriate to this new system of learning. These authors consider that the roles of the tutor, namely: *facilitator, expert, instructor, designer, coach, evaluator, mentor, counselor, manager, moderator, technician* could be arranged in the four principal functions of the tutor: pedagogical, psycho-social, managerial and technical. From this point of view we developed a new set of competencies which are based on the classification of the three phase of the course (the preparation of the course, during the course, at the end of the course) and the competencies from each phase are arranged into the four principal functions of the tutor, namely: pedagogical, psycho-social, managerial and technical. The mentioned competencies are important for the tutoring system in Romania because they show which ones are important for the specific new-born E-learning context of this country and moreover they can form a basis for developing training courses for the tutors in Romania. We can conclude that our theoretical proposal was validated through the research performed and presented in this paper. We consider that the tutors from the E-learning system, with this kind of competencies designed from our research, could act as professional tutors not as volunteer ones.

5 References

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